

**MALE ADOLESCENTS' EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE  
IN AN URBAN, PRIVATE, SECONDARY SCHOOL IN  
KWAZULU NATAL**

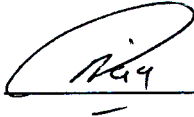
by  
Ryan Doig

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in  
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Supervisor: Prof. N de Lange**

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## **Declaration**

**I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at any other University.**



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R. L Doig

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## **Summary**

This research was undertaken from an ecosystemic perspective and aimed to explore how male adolescents from diverse racial and cultural groups experienced violence in an urban, private, secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal.

The first part of the dissertation consists of a brief introductory overview of the study incorporating background and aim of the research, problem statement, clarification of terminology, research methodology and course of study. A comprehensive literature review, encompassing detailed explanations of the ecosystemic perspective, incorporates a study of violence and its multiple facets, components and interacting contributory systems. Furthermore, a specific rationalization of South African violence and male adolescent violence in South African secondary schools is analytically unpacked.

In line with the researcher's epistemology, the methodology utilised was qualitative in nature and the phenomenological interview technique was employed to explore the experiences of male adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 years. The responses of the participants were subjected to a thematic analysis. The imperative themes that emerged from the data analysis procedure are outlined in the results chapter and it is apparent from the responses of the participants that issues of masculinity, gender-role socialisation, male identity formation and peer pressure are significant contributory factors influencing the prevalence of violence in South African secondary schools. The results are therefore discussed with reference to the literature review and expressly associated with the South African context.

Finally a conclusion is offered together with reflections of the researcher and recommendations for educators.



## **Key Words**

violence

adolescence

gender-role

peer pressure

masculinity

identity

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## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND, AIM, PROBLEM STATEMENT, TERMINOLOGICAL CLARIFICATION, RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND COURSE OF STUDY

*“Domestic and social violence usually starts off with a few angry words and a few hurt feelings that don’t get resolved, and then escalates into feelings of betrayal, rage and revenge. Inner feelings of rage soon spill over into all aspects of society. Social stress multiplies daily with every new report of political upheaval, child abuse, drug abuse, workplace violence, children bringing guns to school, homelessness, ethnic wars or some other crisis. The root cause of a lot of these social stresses is the inner violence created by dysfunctional communication between the heart and the mind. As social stress increases, we’re faced with the choice: Retreat into fear and isolation, become angry and bitter, try to ignore it all, or take responsibility for our own stress reactions.”*

Childre

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Several recent reports have indicated that violence within the South African schooling system is becoming increasingly more frequent, affecting the learner and youth on a physical, psychological, social and educational level (Lockhat & Van Niekerk, 2000: 291). The purpose of this study is to therefore, examine male adolescents’ experiences of violence in an urban, private, secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal. As a country previously affected by the severe historical injustices of the Apartheid system, the context of violence within the South African education system has evolved, from a politically directed struggle amongst the learners, educators and parents (Stevens, Wyngaard & Van Niekerk, 2001: 146), to a phenomenon involving behavioral and social violence that is especially pronounced among young males between the ages of 15 and 24 years (Swart, Seedat, Ricardo & Johnson, 1999; Butchart, Nel & Seedat, 1996). McKendrick and Hoffman (in Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2002: 261) further

describe how the problems of violence affecting the youth of South Africa are of deep social concern, emphasising the need to focus on the views and experiences of South African male adolescents in the secondary school towards violence. In this regard, it is critical to note that the nature of violence cannot be viewed as a single or general societal problem but must rather be studied according to its various different forms. These need to be individually identified, examined and dealt with using specific rather than general criteria (Donald, *et al.*, 2002: 262).

Over and above the physical consequences of violence in schools, there are other concerns and problems that arise from violent assaults or direct exposure to violence which include social dysfunction, poor educational progress, health problems and various complex psychological syndromes (Stevens, *et al.*, 2001: 147). In this respect, all learners have the basic right to an education that is free of intimidation, fear and physical aggression (Stephens, 2000: 122). These provisions and prerequisites are further emphasised in the Constitution of South Africa (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1996: Act 108) as well as the South African Schools Act (Schools Act of RSA, 1996: Act 84) which aim to safeguard learners within the education system and which highlight the need for institutions and government to respond swiftly and appropriately (Naylor, 2002: 2).

Various studies have been conducted within the South African schooling milieu, focusing on gangsterism (Biersteker & Erlank, 2000), bullying (Rigby, 1996; Olweuns, 1993) and gender based violence (Vetten, 2000; Morrell, 1998; Truscott, 1994). In contrast, this research will emphasise the experiences of male adolescents in an urban, private, secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal, regarding violence.

The study will focus on the specific age and gender groups mentioned, as male adolescents are particularly prone to violent activity. In this regard, Vogelmann and Simpson (1990: 2) describe the use of violence by male adolescents in South Africa as an extremely complex and controversial issue, identifying South Africa as a society that endorses and accepts violence, as an acceptable and legitimate means to resolve problems and achieve goals. In South Africa therefore, it is important to conduct a study of this nature as the violent and male dominated South African society has resulted in a fragile Human Rights culture that is being incapacitated, with violence

becoming a statistically normal feature of everyday life (Hamber, 2000: 13). The male adolescent youth hereby, view the use of violence in schools, as an acceptable means of conflict resolution as they have grown up in a patriarchal society, with an ineffectual justice system and the perception that there will be no serious consequences for criminal activity (Simpson & Rauch, 1991: 21). These current and unacceptable levels of violent activity are associated with and intrinsically linked to a socialised cycle of physical aggression. The individual's functionality in this system of violence is linked to, and dependent on, the interaction between a variety of subsystems including the family environment, schooling structure and the wider community. This relationship between the individual and ecosystem, which influences and manipulates human functioning, decision making and action will be further discussed with regards to the ecosystemic perspective.

## **1.2 THEORETICAL LOCATION OF THE STUDY**

### **1.2.1 The ecosystemic theory**

This study will be framed within an ecosystemic approach that emphasises and studies human functioning in relation to the environment, hereby providing a holistic view of the correlation between an individual's development and environmental interaction.

The ecosystemic theory has evolved out of a blend of ecological and systems theory and cybernetics, and is concerned with the social context of an individual and the various interacting and dynamic levels within this context (Donald, *et al.*, 1997: 34). As it originates from the principle of ecology, the theory follows the fundamental assumption that all things in nature are related to one another in a complex but systemic way (Moore, 1997: 555). It is therefore, also concerned with communication networks in systems and subsystems, and with transactions that take place in a particular context.

Hereby, with regards to the individual, the ecosystemic perspective deals with human ecosystems, emphasising the person as a central subsystem within larger systems and as an entity with certain subsystems of its own. Within the larger ecosystem, the



individual, in his or her context, is the key issue and is seen to interact with family, small groups, community and cultural systems. The person is also represented in terms of subsystems of his own. This covers patterns of interaction between the individual's physiological, intrapersonal, verbal and non-verbal functioning as well as interaction with the larger ecosystem previously mentioned (Jasnoski, 1984: 269).

Finally, the cybernetic principles on which ecosystemic thinking is partially based, propose that the interaction within and between systems should be seen in terms of patterns that connect (Bateson, in Donald, *et al.*, 1997: 35). This feedback takes place through circular feedback loops that are apparent in the form of positive and negative feedback.

This qualitative study of male adolescents' experiences of violence in the secondary school can be ideally located within an ecosystemic framework of study, where the precise meaning of violence can be explored within the systems concerned. Issues of violence in schools and within individuals can in this way be assessed in relation to the family, school, community and the individual. In light of the enormous diversity within South African society, the ecosystemic approach offers a way of seeing that can include larger wholes and can penetrate the boundaries between subsystems (Donald, *et al.*, 1997: 237).

### **1.2.2 Related literature**

This study will be primarily related to literature incorporating an ecosystemic approach and explanation of violent activity. This association will integrate and clarify the dual issues of identity formation and socialised aggression. Reference to three central bodies of literature associated with violence in the secondary school, namely: masculinity, gender and peer pressure will also be provided.

#### **1.2.2.1 Masculinity**

Masculinity relates to the general formation and reconstruction of male social identity, in an effort to conform to societal norms regarding acceptable 'male' behaviour. The stereotypical notion of the South African male adolescent learner, promoting

dominance and violence as a means of elevated social standing will be addressed (Leach, 2003a: 63). Certain components of masculinity entail extreme forms of domination and describe how the individual strives for hierarchical leadership, by forcing others to conform to radical principles, rules and structures as a means of constructing and negotiating their masculine selves in social settings (Skelton, 1997: 371-384). This practise of male adolescent masculinity establishment is termed hegemonic masculinity and will also be reviewed in relation to its contribution to violent conflict in the secondary school.

#### **1.2.2.2 Gender**

Gender study highlights and discusses the differences and similarities between boys and girls and emphasises the physiological and psychological reasoning behind inherent or socially constructed behaviour (Vetten, 2000: 45-51). The interaction between gender formation and violence will be reviewed with respect to the male adolescent.

#### **1.2.2.3 Peer pressure**

Peer pressure is defined by Clasen and Brown (1985: 458) as:

Pressure from peers to do something or to keep from doing something else, no matter if you personally want to or not.

The construct of peer pressure, as an adoption of behaviour and appearance of peers and as a consciously employed strategy to enhance personal and social power, will be addressed in the study, with respect to its relationship and interaction with violent behaviour.

The association between the ecosystemic theory and the above mentioned bodies of literature would be the central focus of the study and the research provided will not only be located within this perspective but the ecosystemic theory will also be used to recontextualise the findings.

## **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In order to satisfy the aims of this research, it is important to address the following research questions:

### **1.3.1 Primary research question**

- What are male adolescents' experiences of violence in an urban, private, secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal?

### **1.3.2 Secondary research question**

- What specific recommendations and guidelines can be identified to assist educators in counteracting violence amongst male adolescents within the South African secondary schooling system?

## **1.4 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

### **1.4.1 Primary aim**

The primary aim of the research is to explore male adolescents' experiences of violence in an urban, private, secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal.

### **1.4.2 Secondary aim**

The secondary aim of the study is to identify and generate recommendations and specific guidelines for educators to counteract violence amongst male adolescents in the South African schooling system.

## **1.5 CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY**

### **1.5.1 Adolescent**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) ([www.thehardnessfactor.com](http://www.thehardnessfactor.com) accessed on 2 July 2005) defines adolescence as the period of life between the ages of 10 and 20 years. For the purpose of this study, the term adolescence refers and relates specifically to secondary school learners between the ages of 13 and 19 years of age.

### **1.5.2 Violence**

The WHO (in Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002: 5) defines violence as:

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, deprivation and maldevelopment.

For the purpose of this study, violence relates specifically to interpersonal violence between male adolescent learners in the secondary school.

### **1.5.3 Learner**

The Erudium Organisation ([www.erudium.polymtl.ca](http://www.erudium.polymtl.ca) accessed on 2 July 2005) defines a learner as an individual involved in the acquisition of knowledge or skills in a learning system. In this study a learner relates specifically to male adolescents in the secondary educational milieu.

### **1.5.4 Educator**

An educator is defined by the Resource Discovery Network ([www.rdn.ac.uk](http://www.rdn.ac.uk) accessed on 2 July 2005) as a person with responsibility for developing, managing or delivering

learning resources. For the intention of this investigation, the term relates exclusively to educators situated in the secondary phase of study in private schools.

#### **1.5.5 Secondary school**

The Wikipedia ([en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org) accessed on 2 July 2005) defines secondary education, or secondary school, as a period of education which follows directly after primary education and which may be followed by tertiary education. The exact boundaries of the secondary educational phase vary from country to country but for the purpose of this study it is implicitly associated to learners in Grades 8-12.

#### **1.5.6 Private school**

Princeton University ([www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn](http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn) accessed on 2 July 2005) defines a private school as being a school that is established and controlled privately and supported by endowment and tuition. For the purpose of this research private school relates to an urban, secondary educational institution in Kwazulu-Natal that is privately owned and operated.

### **1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **1.6.1 Research design**

A qualitative, explorative, descriptive and contextual research design will be used (Mouton & Marais, 1990: 159-163) to research the experiences of violence of male adolescents in an urban, private, secondary educational institution in KwaZulu-Natal. The decision to utilise this particular research design was, amongst other pertinent considerations, based on the following reasons:

- Owens (1982: 6) states that events and phenomena cannot simply be teased out from the context in which they are inextricably embedded, and hereby can only comprehensively be understood through consideration of the interrelationships among all of the many parts of the whole.

- Filstead (1970: 6) further asserts that qualitative methodology allows the researcher to get close to the data, thereby developing the analytical, conceptual and categorical components of explanation from the data.

## **1.6.2 Research methodology**

### **1.6.2.1 Sample**

The participants would be adolescent male secondary school learners between the ages of 13 and 19 years. Several learners will be interviewed until the data is saturated. The learners will be purposively selected based on their gender, age and experiences of violence based school occurrences. Participants will be identified and sourced through consultation with the Head of Department of discipline at the school. According to the Violence and Injury Surveillance Consortium, male learners in this specific age group mentioned, are particularly prone to violent activity and behaviour (Violence and Injury Surveillance Consortium, 2000: 5).

### **1.6.2.2 Data collection and analysis**

Data will be gathered using the phenomenological interview (Greeff, 1998: 298-299; Schurink, 1998: 300-304) and the interviews will be conducted in English. Should the necessity arise, an interpreter, familiar with this type of interview technique, will be acquired to interview and translate the responses of non English speaking learners. The same question will be posed to all the participants, namely, "Could you tell me of your experiences of violence in school?" The audio taped interviews will then be transcribed and analysed and a descriptive analysis technique (Tesch, 1990: 154-156) will be utilized. Guba's model to ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 172) will be applied.

Units of meaning will be identified and categorized, after which the emergence of central themes will be established and highlighted. A literature control will be done to recontextualise the findings (Poggenpoel, 1998: 342).

As this research is qualitative in nature, it will not aim to generalise its findings. Rather, the findings will merely highlight a small cross section of data involving male adolescents' experiences of violence in the secondary school.

### **1.6.3 Ethical considerations**

Written consent will be obtained from the Department of Education, principal, participants and their parents or guardians before the interviews are conducted. Furthermore, the dual criteria of confidentiality and anonymity will be consistently observed and ensured.

## **1.7 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

This research is specifically situated in the field of Educational Psychology and Education. The study will be situated within an ecosystemic framework of evaluation and will be associated chiefly with the issues of identity formation and socialised aggression, gender and the construction of adolescent male dominance and masculinity.

## **1.8 COURSE OF STUDY**

Chapter two will involve a comprehensive and content specific review of literature which is specifically concerned and related to the interaction and effects of the ecosystem on the individual, regarding the development of socialised aggression, identity formation and the establishment of male dominance and masculinity amongst male adolescents. The origins of violence, measures to curb violence related conflict and various gender considerations will also be addressed. The review of literature will include both local and international research.

Chapter three will discuss the research design and method utilised in this study. The sampling technique used to purposively select specific learners for interviewing is also highlighted and explained. Furthermore the dual issues of data collection and

analysis will be comprehensively dealt with. Stringent ethical considerations and literature recontextualisation and control are also outlined.

Chapter four will represent the results attained from the study and emphasize the experiences of violence amongst various male adolescent participants. These findings will be outlined, interpreted and discussed.

Chapter five will provide a general overview of the findings regarding the experiences of violence amongst male adolescent learners in the secondary educational sphere. Furthermore recommendations will be identified and specifications for future research will be provided.

## **1.9 CONCLUSION**

This dissertation is aimed at specifically researching the use of violence as a legitimate solution to conflict amongst South African male adolescents in the secondary school. Learner's specific experiences of violence will be taken into consideration and examined, so as to assist in the generation and provision of a basic and useful set of recommendations for educators, learners and communities to utilise, when faced with similar violence related incidents in schools.



## CHAPTER TWO

### VIOLENCE: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

*“It is clear that the way to heal society of its violence...and lack of love is to replace the pyramid of domination with the circle of equality and respect.”*

Manitonquat

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

There is a common perception that violence is an inevitable and intrinsic part of the human condition that occurs universally, entailing a multifaceted dilemma with no simple or single solution (World Health Organisation, 2002: 28). Historically, human relationships have been regularly punctuated by violence and aggression with its existence deeply enmeshed in human interaction on both an interpersonal and intergroup level (McKendrick & Hoffman, 1990: 2). This does not preclude the notion that violence may escalate in accordance with certain situations or locations, rather, its multiple forms, determinants and consequences may rise or fall in relation to inter alia, a variety of individual, socio-cultural and environmental factors and determinants. According to WHO (2002: 27), the current levels of international violence have sharply escalated, with recent figures indicating that violence related deaths have risen to over 4000 people a day and beyond millions a year. The impact of violence furthermore extends into the realm of severe psychological and health implications for the perpetrators, victims and witnesses of violence (WHO, 2002: 27).

The existence of global violence in recent years has therefore become an increasing concern for most international governments and has reached a climax with the horrifying and contemporary spate of terrorism. Schurink, Senekal and Oliphant (2003: 2) state that violence and crime have essentially become complex problems of our globalised contemporary world, encompassing a multifaceted phenomenon of interpersonal violence and large scale collective, social and political violence, originating from the multiple interactions of a variety of factors. These violent based

occurrences have been infused into all societal systems and have had a profound and continued effect on education systems and structures worldwide. School violence is of particular concern as schools not only play a critical role in the teaching of appropriate academic knowledge and employable skills but are expected to instil in their learners a sense of social responsibility, democracy, tolerance and justice, self-discipline and respect for others (Leach, 2003b: 385). Alternatively, education systems are plagued by and subjugated to violent activity and a culture of fear and intimidation. Global edification systems are hereby being eroded by the psychological and physical effects of violence which continue to beleaguer learners (Killian & Govender, 2001: 2) culminating in a climate of emotional instability and fear and creating an unacceptable barrier to learning by hindering efficient management of the schools' social system and educational functionality. In order to effectively understand the diverse nature of violence and its various components and implications, the phenomenon cannot be comprehensively unpacked vis-à-vis a single definitive statement. The notion of violence and its inherent complexities and constituent parts are clarified in the following section.

## **2.2 WHAT IS VIOLENCE?**

Violence occurs in a multiplicity of forms and is generally separated into two broad categories of distinction, namely: interpersonal and intergroup violence. Violence is defined by Lauer (1989: 204) as the utilisation of force to harm, injure or abuse others and he differentiates between the phenomena of intergroup and interpersonal violence as follows:

In intergroup situations the violence ultimately means confrontation between individuals, but the individuals behave violently because of their group affiliation rather than because of some interpersonal difficulty.

A further distinction by Lauer (1989: 204) implies that the individuals involved in interpersonal violence are known to each other, whereas intergroup violence usually occurs between groups who are strangers prior to the confrontation (Lauer, 1989: 204). Zwi, Garfield and Loretto (2002: 216) ascertain that collective violence

presupposes the use of violence by members of a particular group or organisation against another set of individuals, in order to achieve political, social or economic gain. Interpersonal violence on the other hand involves acts of violence which are wilfully directed at a particular individual resulting in the invasion of personal space and individual rights. Interpersonal violence comprises a variety of forms including murder, assault, rape and robbery.

It is significant to note that violence in both these forms is presented as the product of a complex interaction between individual, relationship, community, socio-cultural, political and environmental dynamics. These require simultaneous and fundamental attention at the micro and macro-levels for addressing the social, psychological and biological determinants and consequences of all forms of violence (Seedat, 2002: 313-316).

The contributory and causative factors involved in the determination and formation of violent activity can therefore be framed and more comprehensively understood through an ecosystemic ideology. This perspective is analytically related to the intrinsic and interactive relationship between environmental and biological pre-determinants of human activity, behaviour and exploits. With regards to violence therefore, the ecosystemic framework serves to accentuate the notion that all forms of violence are comprised of and predisposed to, a multifaceted and multifarious arrangement of interrelated systems (Donald, *et al.*, 1997: 34-36) which will be evaluated in section 2.3.

## **2.3 THE ECOSYSTEMIC FRAMEWORK**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

The ecosystemic perspective comprises an integration of various fields of study that encompass overlapping assumptions and compatible epistemologies and which include principles adapted from system theory, ecology and cybernetic approaches (Moore, 1997: 555). The underlying conceptual commonality of these disciplines serves as a mechanism for aptly describing human functioning and interpreting

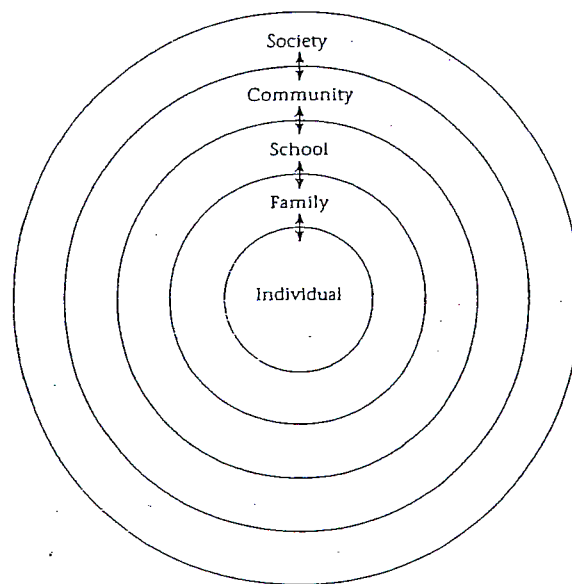
individual behaviour. Furthermore, as the term ecosystemic implies, the approach presupposes a way of looking at human functioning that emphasises the interrelatedness and interdependency between individuals and social systems. Queralt (1996: 17) adds that this development involves a continuous process of adaptation and accommodation between individuals and their environments. This view presupposes that human growth and functioning does not simply occur in a vacuum but rather is the product of continuous interactions and transactions between individuals and various other environmental considerations. Dawes and Donald (2000: 3-5) ascertain that in recent years, researchers have begun to draw increasingly on ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and systems (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) models that recognise the complexity of the multiple interacting systems that determine developmental outcomes.

Donald, *et al.* (1997: 33) further describe that an individual's development is profoundly influenced by social context, including socio-economic conditions, way of life and cultural patterns. This particular viewpoint highlights a severe shortcoming of traditional psychological theory and practise which, historically promotes and establishes that much of their teachings are capable of being taught and applied to people of all cultures, living under vastly diverse social and economic conditions. Traditional psychological approaches therefore presume that the theoretical and practical application of their logic possesses equal significance to a wide range of individuals in any context or miscellaneous environmental locale.

As previously mentioned, the ecosystemic approach is essentially a hybrid of ecological and systems theory, whereby the individual's developmental and behavioural patterns are seen as dynamically interacting with the social context in a mutually dependent and interconnected comportment. The fundamental hypotheses in ecological and systems theory need to be briefly outlined in order to achieve a more concise conceptualisation of the ecosystemic perspective and central concepts relevant to the approach.

### 2.3.2 Ecological framework

According to Donald, *et al.* (2002: 45), ecological theory is based on the interdependence and relationships between different organisms and the environment. Every part possesses equal importance within the system and collectively ensures the continued existence and endurance of the system as a whole. The system is said to be in accord when the interactional relationships within the whole are undisturbed or when temporary change is being successfully accommodated. Major dissonance occurs however, when the relationships and naturally prevailing harmony within the system is threatened, affecting the stability and ability of the entire environment to sustain itself and successfully recover equilibrium (Donald, *et al.*, 1997: 35). Bateson (in Donald, *et al.*, 1997: 35) states that ideas of stability, dissonance and system regularity can be universally applied to all environmental relationships including human beings and their ecological interactions in the social environment. This association can be represented in many ways. Figure 2.1 represents one mode of viewing this relationship.



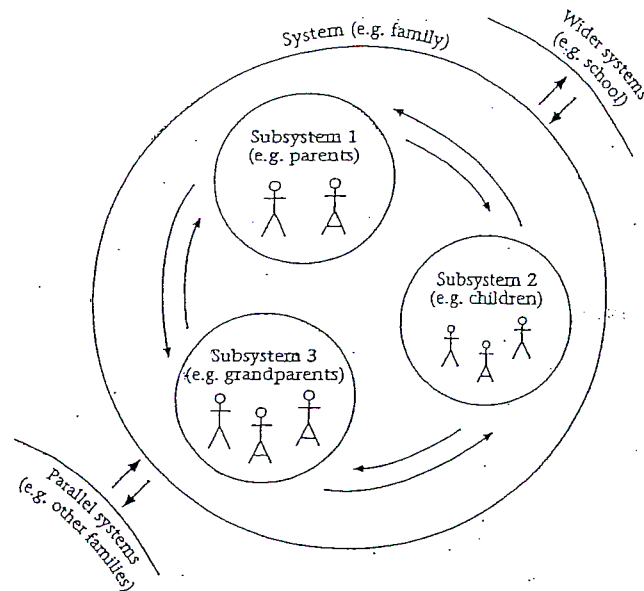
***Fig 2.1: Interacting levels of organization within the social context. (Donald, et al., 1997: 35)***

It is important to note that each level represented is influenced by or influences other levels within the ecological system and that the interaction between the different levels can never be illustrated or represented in any one diagram (Donald, *et al.*, 1997: 36). The theory of ecology is therefore primarily concerned with the effects of ecological dissonance and the manner in which relationships and environmental interactions negotiate with and adjust to transformation.

### **2.3.3 Systems theory**

Souter (2001: 37) ascertains that systems theory refers to the view of interacting units making up an organised whole, whereby the maintenance of all living systems is achieved through the interaction of the constituent parts. Originally proposed by Von Bertalanffy (in Souter, 2001: 37), general systems theory furthermore maintains that the interaction of the fundamental elements and resultant transactional processes which occur between the various parts of the system, transpire via circular feedback mechanisms which operate to sustain the system as self-regulating. In essence therefore, different levels and groupings of the social context are viewed as 'systems' where the functioning of the whole is dependent on the successful interaction between all the elements (Donald, *et al.*, 1997: 36). Systems theory is concerned with the functionally interactive and interdependent relationship between subsystems of which, the whole classification is structurally composed. Malfunctioning in one subsystem can detrimentally agitate the efficient operation of the entire system. This cause and effect relationship between the constituent components manifests itself in cycles and does not simply occur in one direction.

Boundaries between and within subsystems are entirely permeable which enables and fosters constant interaction at the various levels of individual and environmental subsystems. Figure 2.2 aptly displays this association.



**Fig2.2: Systems, subsystems and their interaction (Donald, et al., 1997: 37)**

Various other elements are essential in the perception and understanding of any system. These include inter alia, a system's specific underlying values and goals, variance in subsystem overlapping and function, communicated patterns between various subsystems and the definition and nature of the variable role of diverse subsystems. These particular facets have a decisive effect on the functioning of the system as an entity and are elements which are indispensable when attempting to understand the nature and process of system functionality.

#### **2.3.4 Ecosystemic theory**

The ecosystemic perspective is consequently a result of systems and ecology theory and the approach encompasses the human system as the central unit of analysis, with the environment forming the context in which behaviour transpires and develops. In essence this theoretical slant establishes that an examination and understanding of individual behaviour requires a critical and comprehensive investigation of the



context in which it occurs. In this regard, Jasnoski (1984: 270) observes that in combination, individual and environmental systems function synergistically implying that the impact of the whole ecosystem is greater than the sum of its individual components.

Unlike traditional psychology-based literature, which has historically focused on a narrow and finite set of variables related to aspects of individual behaviour, including age and gender issues, the ecosystemic perspective focuses on an individual's interaction and development amid a range of contextual and environmental variables including socio-environmental, socio-cultural, family and various individual dynamics. The ecosystemic approach has further asserted that individual psychological and health factors are caused, maintained or perpetuated by a multiple range of interacting variables which consequently have the potential to either ameliorate or exacerbate the impact of negative experience (Guterman & Cameron, 1997: 498).

The ecosystemic perspective therefore views the human being as a subsystem within a hierarchy of larger systems. The individual however, occupies the central position within the system, and in turn is made up of certain subsystems that include physiological, intrapersonal, bodily, cognitive and spiritual dimensions (Hancock, in Meyer, *et al.*, 1997: 559). The elicitation of complex psychological syndromes, such as violence, is most comprehensively unpacked via an ecosystemic framework of interpretation.

## **2.4 THE ECOSYSTEMIC CYCLE OF VIOLENCE**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

Violence is an integral component of human nature and environmental interaction and is a behaviour which can only be adequately explained via an investigation of human association and relationship within the social context and setting within which the person resides. Violence manifests itself in a multitude of diverse forms and as with any other complex psychological syndrome, develops from childhood, with its



ultimate peripheral manifestation, dependent on both the psychological components of the individual as well as the nature of and manner in which the individual interacts and interprets the environment in which they exist.

The characteristics and utilisation of violence by human beings can therefore be best interpreted through the use of an ecosystemic analysis framework. In an attempt to comprehend the use of force and violence by an individual on an intergroup or interpersonal level, various categories and interrelated subsystems relevant to and interdependent with that individual, require examination and close inspection. This epistemological approach shifts the focus of analysis from the individual to the ecological relationship system. Hereby, an examination of pathological type behaviour such as violence, demands the attention of the entire classification and averts the interpretation of such behavioural responses away from traditional linear cause and effect sequences to studying the phenomenon through a reciprocally causal system of interaction i.e. “the ecosystemic relationship system” (Banning, 1989: 2).

#### **2.4.2 Interacting systems: Identifying the cause of violence**

Souter (2001: 39) asserts that a systems approach to gaining a clearer understanding of pathological behaviour is offered as an alternative means of eliminating the culpability for a specific problem from the individual, by broadening the view of the particular distressing issue. Consequently, it is significant to bear in mind that the problem of violence is not simply located within one level or subsystem but rather is the result of various dynamic interactions and oftentimes substantial disturbances between a variety of levels, which can result in the entire structure lacking overall balance and coordination (Donald, *et al.*, 2002: 236). It is further emphasised that as an individual occupies centrality within the ecosystemic epistemology, they must be seen as an active agent and fundamental component in their own development (Donald, *et al.*, 2002: 237). An individual’s interactive affiliation and intrinsic engagement within systems, as well as the relationship between the diverse and constituent levels of each system, need to be comprehensively addressed in order to instigate effectual manipulation and assistance vis-à-vis major social and interpersonal difficulties.

Moore (1997: 561) decisively reasserts that different individuals assign diverse meanings to everything they encounter, hereby identifying that different persons construe, recognise or interpret reality in dissimilar ways. The ecosystemic approach encompasses a constructivist epistemology and accentuates the notion that meaning attached to various topics or life experiences are determined by that particular person and not by the topic or experience (Dell, in Meyer, *et al.*, 1997: 561). The diverse meanings adopted by an individual reflect a person's interpersonal needs, values, goals and priorities which are in turn interrelated and intrinsically connected to the context of interaction and the larger milieu in which the interaction transpires.

Systemic thinkers often describe behaviour, including dysfunctional behaviour, as being circular in nature, indicating that the problem of violence is not an issue of cause and effect and hereby cannot simply be located within the individual but is rather the product of reciprocal determinism. The ultimate manifestation of violent behaviour arising within a system is therefore perceived as having circular causality (Souter, 2001: 39).

Catterall (1998: 303) furthermore identifies that viewing the relationships between individual and context independently, regrettably has the effect of pathologising whole populations as well as globally characterising groups or classes of people and overlooking individuals who do not conform to stereotypes. Traditional psychological process, whereby the multifaceted and multidimensional aspects of violence *inter alia* social context, economic deprivation, dysfunctional community and family existence and restrictive resources are ignored and whereby an individual's behaviour is inappropriately generalised, represents a severe deficiency and exhibits a restrictive analysis and expose of human functioning and conduct.

#### **2.4.3 Levels of association**

In order to fully understand the notion of violence it is imperative to identify the various levels of a system and the way in which they interact in causing, manipulating and maintaining social and interpersonal problems (Donald, *et al.*, 2002: 239). The individual within the ecosystemic perspective is therefore not labelled with a

classification of pathology but rather the entire system demands and is afforded the attention of intervention (Banning, 1989: 2).

As formerly mentioned, there are a vast number of levels within each particular system that all execute a fundamental function in developing and affecting human behaviour and response. The operation and effect of several significant systems and subsystems need to be clarified prior to assessing the motivation and rationale between groups and individuals, regarding the ultimate culmination of violence. The individual's centrality within these interrelated systems needs to be constantly recognised.

#### **2.4.3.1 Socio–environmental context and economic depravity**

Contextual factors can be described as either moderating or mediating the outcome of violence. In this regard, Donald, *et al.* (2002: 239) highlight the powerful effect that the social classification as a whole has on the various other levels of the system. To comprehensively understand the issue of violence, the influence of the entire social structure and its incumbent values, goals, culture, policies and practises require serious consideration and examination. Hereby, a society's inherent attitudes and cultural mechanisms may acknowledge the employment of violent activity as a 'normal' and customary social practise and as acceptable means of conflict resolution. Donald, *et al.* (2002: 240) state that what is perceived as a severe social dilemma in one community, may be viewed as less so—or not at all—in another. The common social practises of a specific social system will in turn influence the way in which educational implementation, peer group interaction and relationships within families and between community members are conducted.

Social systems and larger environmental classifications are significantly affected by the severity or complacency of good fortune or unremitting adversity. The manner in which social interactions and institutions within a particular society are conducted is largely influenced by the socio–economic status of the system or community concerned. Although violence, crime and aggression exist universally in all societal contexts and in any environmental locale irrespective of socio-economic conditions, socially destitute and economically disadvantaged environments are characterised by

stresses that are intense, numerous and unavoidable. Tolleson (1997: 415-431) additionally notes that violence is an important psychological feature of these living environments whereby the perpetration of violence becomes a means for an individual, residing in a socially and economically underprivileged setting, to transcend their fear of succumbing to a violent death by adapting to reality and consequently engaging in acts of violence.

Furthermore, Kelly (2001: 284-297) proposes that violence practised by members of disadvantaged communities may be due to a culmination of factors ranging from dysfunctional families and including the restriction of resources that foster the development of a stable social identity. Donald, *et al.* (2002: 239) maintain that living under conditions of poverty has many resultant effects on an individual's growth and development whereby feelings of frustration, despair and anger, not only feed into the wider cycle of social and interpersonal difficulties, but may contribute to violence as a vent to anger or as a sheer means of survival.

Garbarino (1998: 54) further alludes to the degree of disorder in poverty stricken communities including physical deterioration, dilapidated buildings and various social incivilities such as drinking, drug-dealing and violence. Such neighbourhoods are described as dangerous, decayed and 'socially toxic' whereby the provision of opportunities for youths, entail a socialisation into violent and deviant subcultures (Garbarino, 1998: 54). This socially noxious environment suggests that the social context in which youths develop has become poisonous to their development. Essentially the build-up of toxic substances in the physical context hereby directly impacts on the cognitive, social and emotional development of the individual (Garbarino, 1998: 55). Effectively situating environmental contexts and socio-economic factors in the ecosystemic framework successfully facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of distal risks and constraints that influence violence. The above exposition summarily draws consideration inherent in socio-economically deprived living environments and assesses the relevance of these constraints and how they relate to their inherent potential and ability in manipulating violent behaviour. This being noted, it is the individual in these particular situations that occupies a position of centrality within the system and the person's behaviour can either be conspicuous for its adaptive or pathological qualities.

While macro–societal institutions are largely beyond the control of any individual, the impact of societies’ underlying attitudes, values and inherent functioning, ultimately filters through to living environments, communities, families and individuals. The environmental and socio–economic context is furthermore inextricably intertwined with the socio–cultural values and beliefs of the community. Particular socialised practises and behavioural tendencies are hereby reinforced via the community context and the influential role of community culture will now be examined.

#### **2.4.3.2 Community context**

According to Rappaport (2000: 6), people who hold common stories about where they come from, who they are and who they will want to be, constitute a community. These shared narratives accordingly reflect the psychological ‘sense’ of community life. A community’s supportive capacity is affected by the existence of an efficient mechanism of aid and the accessibility of resources. These factors are critical contextual elements and may inhibit or promote sub–cultures of deviant and violent behaviour. The community’s specific belief and value system may or may not reinforce broader societal institutions but have a profound, immediate and authoritative influence on behavioural exploits of individuals residing and interacting within its boundaries and organisational structures.

Donald, *et al.* (2002: 239) further assert that communities differ widely in terms of their resources and values, which are dynamics that have an intense and marked effect on social and interpersonal difficulties such as violence. Issues of pathological behavioural manifestations are therefore further compounded by communities that are characterised by poverty and lack of resources hereby adversely effecting interpersonal growth and development. Dawes and Donald (2000: 8) comment that community influences may create challenges for youths at particular stages in their development and can positively or unfavourably effect emotional growth, trust and intellectual development.

Depending on identifiable socialisation practises and a community’s specific value system, the expression of aggression may be reinforced or mitigated in that explicit culture. Similarly, diverse varieties of violence may be sanctioned and manifested in

various ways such as media programmes or even borne out as an acceptable means of resolving disquieting interpersonal and intergroup concerns. In this regard, the conceptualisation of violence differs noticeably cross-culturally, and what is construed as macho and masculine type behaviour in one community may be adversely perceived as barbarism in another (Donald, *et al.*, 2002: 240).

Waller (2001: 6) makes reference to risk and protective factors that co-exist within any ecosystem and which have pertinence to individuals confronted by extreme hardship such as violence, within an unsafe and dangerous community context. Waller (2001:6) further alleges that a person challenged by adversity in one context is likely to be confronted by adversity in other areas as well i.e. an individual residing in a high crime area is likely to attend a school with inadequate resources and hereby is faced with multiple risk factors. Violence within a community context therefore is often the result of a pervasive sequence of adversity whereby the presence and unrelenting impact of multiple stressors tend to exacerbate the effect of a concomitant individual variable.

The extensive differences in cultural practises, the expression of violence and differences in socialisation processes will be addressed with specific reference to South African violence later in the chapter. This socialisation process transcends mere individuals or groups of people and extends rather into the realms of appropriate and stereotypical gender roles, issues of masculinity and an expression of wider societal influences and social and environmental implications. Gender role socialisation, masculinity and peer pressure are hence critical issues that will be addressed via an appraisal on the effect and role of the education system on violent behaviour.

#### **2.4.3.3 The school**

Cowie and Pecherek (1994: 13) assert that schools exist not only to facilitate the education of young people but to enhance the integral components of self-growth and self-knowledge amongst learners. In this regard, as with whole communities, schools are fundamentally influenced by resources and values whereby effective educational process is severely curtailed by inadequate resources, social and interpersonal societal nuisances and the existence and implementation of an ineffectual value and cultural



system (Donald, *et al.*, 2002: 241). According to Hernandez and Seem (2004: 258) schools therefore also function as significant socialising agents in the development of young people insofar as the social norms and values upheld by society in general, and the local community in particular, are played out in the educational milieu.

Children therefore require an education system that encompasses a healthy and safe environment where they can learn efficiently and develop socially, intellectually and emotionally (Sathiparsad, 2003: 109). The pervasiveness and existence of violence in schools has conversely resulted in the creation of a climate of fear, emotional unrest and obstacles to the learning process (Hernandez & Seem, 2004: 256-257) and has generally served to negate positive interactional relationships between peers, and peers and educators, compromising the social climate and culture within schools and facilitating the undermining of the entire educational process.

As previously assessed, since violence is a systemic problem related to a variety of interactive and interdependent systems, the subsistence of a secure school climate is essentially a reflection of micro-community and macro-social issues that has led to a complex interplay between a lack of structural and organisational containment for learners and susceptibility to being impacted upon by a range of potentially negative and violent influences (Stevens, *et al.*, 2001: 146).

Furthermore, Coleman and Deutch (1998: 1) postulate that too often, schools are structured to advance intense competition between learners, which induces the use of coercion, threat or deception; fosters attempts to enhance power differences between students; generates suspicion and hostility and increases the importance, rigidity and size of conflicts. On the contrary, schools that revere principles of learner equality, human dignity and the right to privacy, security and respect will sustain and nourish a physically and psychologically safe learning environment (Prinsloo, 2005: 1).

Due to the extreme psychological and physiological changes that occur during adolescence, violence predominantly occurs in the secondary educational sphere. Subsequently many studies have indicated that this violence is disproportionately but not exclusively carried out by adolescent males (Leach, 2003b: 386; Lesko, 2000: 286). The frequent nature of male adolescent violence is a complex and multifaceted

phenomenon and needs to be summarily addressed vis-à-vis issues of masculinity, gender role socialisation and peer pressure.

#### **2.4.3.3.1 Masculinity**

Connell (1995: 71) postulates that masculinity cannot be defined or understood as a separate entity. Rather it can only subsist within a system of gender relations, simultaneously occurring as part of a gendered classification involving the engaged practises of men and women, and the effects of these practises in bodily experience, personality and culture. Vogelmann (1990: 28) further asserts that masculinity is associated with aggression, rationality, independence, strength and dominance and establishes that failure to conform to these qualities can result in social ostracisation and derision. Masculinities are hereby not individualised pathologies but are socially organised and meaningful mannerisms that manifest in historical contexts involving a variety of different kinds of language, physical, sexual and material actions (Lesko, 2000: vvi).

Masculinity itself cannot exist in a vacuum or as pathology of individual personality; rather the concept must be recognised as profoundly intertextual and consequently constructed, performed and revised across knowledge, symbols, styles, subjectivities and norms. To establish and conceptualise the multiple political and social aspects of masculinity, it is critical to interpret them within particular historical, gender, sexuality and political contexts (Uebel, 1997; Kimmel, 1996; Mac an Ghail, 1994; Davies, 1992).

In this respect, certain forms of masculinity may be described as properties of institutional networks rather than of individuals. Popular culture assists in this provision of familiar illustration, whereby boys often recite lines and mimic actions from movies specifically re-enacted from scenes that portray gender-stereotyped or aggressive masculinist activities. In this way, boys learn stereotypical masculinist attitudes and behaviour, by literally reproducing them from each other (Nespor, 2000: 37).



Overt masculine behaviour is predominantly prevalent in young men or adolescents as it manifests in individuals most likely to buck authoritarian institutions and adolescent males recognise early on that society does not provide for them a place in which they can legitimately exercise their power (Phillips, 1993: 28). It is further asserted that young men have essentially learned that males should possess power and knowledge and due to the realisation that they cannot gain that power within restrictive societal systems, they inevitably construct a parallel system of their own in which to rule (Phillips, 1993: 28).

Regarding institutional structures as social networks in which masculinities evolve, schools are widely recognised as being establishments where masculinities are made, negotiated and regulated (Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), 2003: 1). Furthermore, Morrell (1998: 107) highlights the intrinsic correlation between violence and boys, assessing that constructions of masculinity frequently emphasise their ability to be violent and to uncomplainingly endure pain. Morrell (1998: 107) further establishes that democratic education cannot occur in violent schools, necessitating immediate action in tackling the issue of masculinity, to facilitate the creation of environments which are conducive to successful and safe educational practise.

Phillips (1993: 220) reasserts that the secondary schooling structure is the system in which boys learn to utilise their training in being male, to lever themselves up and out into a more powerful position in society. Similarly, adolescent males will adopt violent strategies in which they can vent their anger and frustration regarding entrenched societal and familial limitations (Phillips, 1993: 77) resulting in the creation of power structures that involve mirror images of the structures in the legitimate world, where it is similarly beneficial to possess power as an aversion to being pushed around (Phillips, 1993: 34).

This masculine advancement up the social ladder possesses various negative consequences and Clare (2000: 67) states that repeated exposure to violence amongst certain children may cause the individual to develop impulsive anger and aggression; and in others, repeated exposure to humiliation, bullying and physical or emotional violence can shut down the brain's responsiveness. These specific individuals develop into the hollow young men whose sensitivity to the needs and experiences of others is

non-existent. Hereby, self-esteem is grounded in the extent to which they feel superior to rules and controls and can live by their violence (Clare, 2000: 64).

Clare (2000: 67) further raises a critical comparison between violence and masculinity, postulating that upon consideration and assimilation of the traits and attitudes necessary for violence with the concomitant traits and attitudes characteristically thought of as masculine, the link between violence and masculinity becomes clearer. This link is further unravelled by Phillips (1993: 222) who identifies that secondary-school anger expressed physically, is accepted and is a way of establishing hierarchies and settling scores that is inherently unemotional. Boys learn that male aggression is natural, inevitable and something that they can use to assert dominance. Inescapably therefore, episodes of violence and bullying are excessively prevalent among boys at secondary school and can almost be classified as initiation rites set by older children, as the start of the hardening process that leads to adult masculinity (Phillips, 1993: 74). Goldberg (1976: 43-44) states, that lessons in violence, indifference and separation are provided every day for every male child within the educational system and learning them essentially becomes part of learning to survive as a boy. In this sense, hard-men are not self-constructed and the man who 'feels', becomes inefficient because his emotional involvement inevitably slows him down and distracts him, allowing for his more dehumanised male competitors to pass him by (Goldberg, 1976: 43-44).

Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997: 119) argue hereby that violent males draw from the repertoire of masculine values, attributes and practises and exaggerate, distort and glorify them. Similarly, assertiveness may be overstated to become aggression, physical strength to toughness associated with physically beating others, bravery to bravado and cruelty, rationality to the rationalisation of violence and competitiveness to hostility (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1997: 121).

The above supposition effectively illustrates the intrinsic link between masculinity and violence and Gilbert and Gilbert (1998: 195-196) establish that we need to reject explanations of violence which do not adequately recognise the role of masculinity. As both concepts of violence and masculinity are assimilated via biological predetermination (Clare, 2000: 50; Vogelmann, 1990: 42) and socio-cultural and

historical socialisation dynamics (Connell, 1995: 67-86; Phillips, 1993: 9) mechanisms in the school exist as critical contextual sites where violence and masculinity are observed, constructed and perpetuated. There are several ways in which the education system participates in the formation and socialisation of a gendered schooling environment, which promotes masculine values and male dominance. These need to be addressed in order to foster an equal, safe and non-violent school culture. These gendered educational practises and implications are vilified in the following subsection.

#### **2.4.3.3.2 Gender and gender-role socialisation**

In order to clearly conceptualise the notion of gender, an immediate differentiation between gender and sex needs to be established. Hamilton (1998: 4) distinguishes between the two terms as follows:

Whereas sex denotes a limited set of innate structural and physiological characteristics related to reproduction and divides animal species into male and female, gender is specific to humans and connotes all complex attributes ascribed by cultures to human males and females respectively.

The concept of an individual's 'gender role' refers to overt behaviours that establish one's gender in the eyes of others (Marlowe, 1981: 210). The formation of gender role identity is strongly influenced and constructed by societal expectations, interpersonal and familial relationships and community and contextual attitudes, pressures and values. The African National Congress ([www.anc.org.za](http://www.anc.org.za) accessed on 9 November 2005) defines such socialisation, as being created by society through the prevalence and pervasiveness of institutions such as familial, religious and the education systems. Research has shown (Kessler & McKenna, 1978) that gender therefore, does not simply emerge from anatomy or hormones, rather its inherent meanings are created and recreated through the social order and social practises. Gender is hereby described as being embedded in an array of institutional arrangements and structures that make up society. Lesko (2000: vii) hereby compares schools as being like factories, producing gendered individuals, both in the official curriculum via textbooks,

prescribed literature and educator resources and in the parallel 'hidden' curriculum through the informal interactions of educators and learners.

The schooling system is a primary social practise in the formation and recognition of gender roles and masculinity (De la Rey, 2001: 1). Through the very ways in which education systems operate on a daily basis, schools serve to reinforce and recreate gendered persons and practises. In this regard, the work of Connell (1996: 206-235) presents a practical and contemporary identification of ways in which schools actively contribute to constructions of gender. Two of these components of gender regime are summarily discussed below, with reference to Connell's (1996: 206-235) framework of gender construction in schools:

- **Power relations** – Power is at work at every level of interaction in schools.<sup>1</sup> On the structural level, there are relations of power between educators, educators and learners and between learners themselves. However power exists in less formal ways involving struggles with respect to discipline and control, the policing and monitoring of behaviour and in patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Gender establishment is embedded in these formal and informal structures of power, with the typical pattern being the association of masculinity and men with power.<sup>2</sup>
- **Curriculum structure and sport** – The gendered division of the curriculum is blatantly apparent via the process and selection of subject packages, whereby subject specialisations among educators, typically mirror traditional

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert and Gilbert (1998: 114-115) postulate that schools, like all institutions, are thoroughly gendered in their own organisation and practise. Hereby, gender is pervasively and powerfully implicated in the construction of the expectations, relationships, rules and routines of the system. Masculinity and male dominance are prevalent in the very form of organisational management where an ideology of masculinity is in the ascendant, producing a sexist division of administrative tasks and status hierarchy and whereby the more authoritarian male educators collude with male learners' opposition to the school ethos, by maintaining control in ways that reflected the same dominant authority forms followed by the boys themselves (Mac an Ghail, 1994: 30).

<sup>2</sup> Dunne, Leach, *et al.*, (2003) ; Stephens (1998); Gordon (1993) have highlighted the role that the school organisation, informal school practises and teacher's attitudes play in sending messages about gender differentiation, which largely underscore male authority and superiority.

gender roles. Women educators are hereby concentrated in subjects such as language and home economics and men in the sciences and mathematics.<sup>3</sup> Another significant site of gendered division in schools exists in the realm of the sporting milieu, where strict rules determine that certain sports such as soccer, rugby and cricket are reserved for boys only.<sup>4</sup> Moreover these sports are clearly valued differentially within the school culture, with high prestige and value allocated to boy's sports and girls often fulfilling desirable feminine activities such as cheerleading or drum majorettes, as an offering of support when boys' matches are being played.<sup>5</sup> Gilbert and Gilbert (1998: 60) depict men's sport as the archetype of institutionalised masculinity, and the images of men which dominate its ideology are the quintessential manifestation of the patriarchal and hegemonic masculinist<sup>6</sup> ethos that pervades within educational structures. Sport is hereby strongly associated and constructed as a hegemonically masculine activity narrowly representing the image and creation of manhood as being tough, competitive and dominant. Various studies in schools have indicated patterns of hegemony vividly whereby in certain schools the masculinity exalted through competitive sport is hegemonic; meaning that sporting prowess becomes a test of masculinity even for boys who detest sporting participation. These individuals who reject the hegemonic pattern and regime are required to fight or negotiate their way out (Connell, 1995: 37).

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<sup>3</sup> This stratification has assisted with the creation of the prejudice that boys are naturally interested or talented in these subjects, and the recognition that these are high status subjects that will provide boys with access to desirable male careers, has been a factor in the position of power that men have traditionally held in the workforce (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998: 122).

<sup>4</sup> Connell (1995: 54) postulates that the institutional organisation of sport embeds definite social relations: competition and hierarchy among men and exclusion or domination of women. These social relations of gender are both realised and symbolised in the bodily performances and serve as a symbolic proof of men's superiority and right to rule.

<sup>5</sup> In a South African study of white masculinity in boarding schools in Natal, Morrell (1994a: 27-52) identifies how the development of rugby contributed to the formation of white masculinity that revolved around being physically tough and rugged.

<sup>6</sup> Hegemonic masculinity is defined by Connell (1995: 77) as the configuration of gender practise that legitimises a system of patriarchy and which guarantees the dominant position of men and subordination of women. Hegemonic masculinity is hereby associated with classifications of subordination, power-relations and violence as part of a system of patriarchy and domination (Connell, 1995: 84).

Consequently, the idolisation of first team rugby and cricket players contributes to forms of masculinity which stress the importance of physicality, power and competitive success and that establishes levels of aggression as socially acceptable (Morrell, 1996; Messner & Sabo, 1990). These messages are welcomed by the boys themselves who are the beneficiaries of patriarchy and whose behaviour perpetuates and manifests in male decision making, physical toughness and the notion that disputes can be resolved by physical violence (Morrell, 1998: 109).

A final analysis on sport and its interactional involvement in the construction of gender and masculinity in schools is that it affords support to intolerance of forms of masculinity other than those which are hegemonic. In this respect, it specifically promotes homophobia (Morrell, 1994b) whereby boys who do not participate in sporting activities or who do not satisfy or contribute to the masculine sporting culture of the school, are labelled as homosexual, ostracised and victimised. The prescriptions of hegemonic masculinity therefore prevent a shift away from both misogyny and homophobia (Morrell, 1998: 109).

As previously discussed, violence and masculinity are inextricably interrelated and hence the male dominated gendered constructions within global education systems contribute to the inevitable prominence and existence of a culture characterised by violence and aggression. The link between masculinity, gender role identity and violence is therefore clear (cf. 2.5.2) and the existence of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal oppression in schools ultimately sanction violence as a legitimate form of structural and social dominance, conflict resolution and coercion.

#### **2.4.3.3.3 Peer pressure**

The education system has a powerful role to fulfil with respect to its involvement regarding the containment of negative peer influences and constructions. Lingren (1995: 1) asserts that during adolescence, interaction with one's peers and the attraction of peer identification increases due to the rapid physical, emotional and social changes that occur. Adolescents consequently persist in questioning adult



standards and the need for parental guidance wanes, while peer relations expand to occupy a particularly central role in young people's lives (Lingren, 1995: 1).

In highlighting the intrinsic connection between issues of masculinity, gender-role socialisation and peer pressure, Phillips (1993: 60) asserts that it is within the education system where boys specifically start learning the rules of masculinity from their peers and the most influential and dominant figures in the playground, who will convey most forcibly what it means to be male. Subsequently, in an effort to develop a sense of masculinity, a boy becomes very particular about who he associates with. Phillips (1993: 203) further identifies that studies of boys' behaviour in schools reveal that they are the individuals most susceptible to peer pressure and it is through rigid peer-monitoring that they learn what is considered to be gender-appropriate behaviour.

Leach (2003b: 389) states that recent attention has been offered to the ways in which particular versions of masculinity are facilitated by learners and the role of the peer group in this particular construction. Certain male peer group cultures generate concepts of masculinity and masculine definitions of success and failure and these contribute to patterns of male disaffection and underachievement. Consequently, boys who do not conform may be bullied, assaulted or victimised in various ways (Leach, 2003b: 389-390).

Donald, *et al.* (2002: 244) establish that during adolescence, the peer group possesses a prominent influence on deviant behaviour that exists as the product of specific social and interpersonal problems. An inadequacy within familial and educational systems enhances the prospect of the individual seeking an alternative source of identity status, acceptance and support in the peer group (Donald, *et al.*, 2002: 244). Within the secondary schooling system certain male adolescent peer classifications sanction the physical expression of violence as acceptable and endorse violence and aggression as a means of establishing hierarchies and enforcing male dominance (Phillips, 1993: 222). Within any schooling structure therefore, there are often two systems at work: the official system, in which boys who do well academically are rewarded, and the unofficial system, in which boys who create alternative power

structures are rewarded by the adulation and reverence received from their peers (Phillips, 1993: 234).

Davies (1992: 127-136) concludes that the ethos of the school, school organisational processes, allocation of responsibilities and the role models that it offers learners, may encourage boys to act out what they perceive to be appropriately aggressive male behaviour. The school hereby plays a significant part in the creation and manipulation of a positive peer environment as during this formative age of adolescence, it is particularly easy for learners to develop the perception that masculine identity is associated with aggressive, dominant and violent behaviour (Leach, 2003b: 390).

#### **2.4.3.4 Family context**

Garbarino (1998: 1) ascertains that the quality and character of parenting, results in part, from the social context in which families operate and he refers to relationships in which parents discover material, emotional and social encouragement compatible with their needs, capacities and beliefs in raising children. Garbarino (1998: 3) also emphasises the important contribution that an ecological perspective has to make in understanding that parenting is not simply confined to individual personality and family dynamics but rather is a reflection of broader socio-cultural forces that exist in the environment.

Ultimately therefore the effect of a community's value structure and various enforced societal institutions such as educational structures, will impact directly on the family context and operation, facilitating the implementation, adaptation and enforcement of family values, beliefs and traditions which are contingent on historical and cultural conditions (Inglehart & Baker, 2000: 19-51). Concomitantly, Cowie and Sharp (1998: 7) confirm that experiences within the family execute a vital function in influencing an individual's capacity to socially interact in the context of the wider community and to establish strategies in forming significant and mutually effective relationships outside the family. Individuals who have lacked in family support or who have experienced insecure attachment relationships within the family system, will display qualities of insecurity and lack of trust and hereby act in ways that elicit rejection, dislike or avoidance in others (Cowie & Sharp, 1998: 8).



Donald, *et al.* (2002: 270) maintain that individuals learn towards diverse societal groups according to the values held by their parents and other significant people. Similarly, individuals who have grown up in harsh, strict and demanding family groups learn to suppress their anger and frustration in relation to authority and behave violently towards people construed to being in a weaker and more vulnerable position than themselves (Donald, *et al.*, 2002: 270). The offender hereby becomes a victim who carries the burden of a dysfunctional family environment, and the violent act itself, forms part of a larger pattern of dysfunction.

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (1991: 17) indicate that there are a host of intermingled and intergenerational transactions that occur concurrently and emphasise this particular notion of systems thinking as follows:

- The disordered family system is seen as needing some family member to express the psychopathology.
- The identified participant is an essential part of the problem.
- The present situation is the major causal factor, since the problem is currently reinforced in order to continue to exist.

With regard to violence therefore, the influence of power and control within the family system may not be entirely transparent, but current structural beliefs and values reinforced by family institutions are often borne out via the actions of particular family members. In this way, the use of violence is condoned and becomes a mechanism whereby the individual involved in the destructive behavioural pattern is inherently a critical component of the pathological manifestation.

#### **2.4.3.5 The individual**

Together with the effect of several other pertinent subsystems, the joint issues of societal, economic, community, educational and familial structures have a palpable influence on an individual's decision to engage in violent activity and ultimately

profoundly affect the maintenance and development of a personal belief and value system. Bearing this in mind, it has been constantly stressed that each person occupies an integral position in the wider context of interaction, which enforces an ability to generate modification or alter interactional relationships with others. This innate ability to inculcate informed decisions may lead to change and development in the family, community and social systems previously discussed (Donald, *et al.*, 1997: 64).

Donald, *et al.* (2002: 223) further postulate, that an individual's inherent characteristics play a critical role in the decision making process vis-à-vis numerous temperamental, cognitive and personality characteristics that assist in the development of personal resilience. This personal resilience aids the individual in actively coping with societal risks and stresses. Donald, *et al.* (2002: 223) highlight these positive characteristics as follows:

- ***Effective communication and general problem solving skills*** through which individuals are able to express their needs, thoughts and feelings enabling them to confront problematic life experiences and assist in feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.
- ***A positive self-concept***, feeling of self-worth and strong interpersonal skills. Through feeling good about themselves, individuals are able to actively and positively engage with others, empowering themselves as people in their own right.
- ***A strong internal locus of control*** without which individual's feel powerless and passively subject to whatever happens to them. An internal locus of control is effective in that the person feels that they possess a semblance of control over their environment creating possibilities of hope, planning and personal goal setting.

These character traits can be developed via the family, community and educational contexts within which the child interacts. Again it is noted that individual behaviour exploits are the product of interaction between various systems and as Barry (1996: 1)

aply postulates, the combined influences of community, family, society and individual on socially disruptive behaviour such as violence, are mutually reinforcing. Pathological type behaviour is therefore the direct result of a circular trend of disintegration of community, weakening of family values, economic depravity and problematic individual behavioural manifestation. Once this pernicious cycle exists it becomes increasingly difficult to repeal and the people who can provide stability and leadership in the community begin to leave, crime increases and the entire social structure of the environmental locale destabilises and collapses (Barry, 1996: 2).

## **2.5 SOUTH AFRICA: A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE**

### **2.5.1 Introduction**

Butchart, *et al.* (1996: 4) highlight the prominence and pervasiveness of violence in South African life, indicating that the country is among the most violent nations in the world with an incidence rate for violent death nearly six times of that of the United States, which in turn is considered to be among the world's most violent societies. It is further emphasised by Schurink, *et al.* (2003: 2) that violence and crime in South Africa has become one of the most serious, conspicuous and encompassing social problems of our modern era. The roots and problems of violence in this country are numerous and stem from a social, economic, political and racially disparate Apartheid policy that has ultimately 'bequeathed' to South Africa a "culture of violence" (Simpson, 1993: 1). Apartheid has hereby left a legacy of severe disproportion, leaving individuals of all ages to contend with a society struggling to meet the most fundamental needs of its citizens (Engelbrecht, 2003: 2). Simpson (1993: 1) asserts that these racially-based, hostile stereotypes generated by Apartheid, coupled with the resultant political intolerance, have continued to articulate closely with experiences of economic impoverishment and encroaching poverty for the majority of South Africans (Simpson, 1993: 1). Due to political promises of basic healthcare, housing, sanitation and employment, the bulk of the population has in turn become extremely aggravated and impatient, which has further enhanced the prospect of violence, and as Hunt (2003: 1) indicates, South Africa's current elevated rate of violent crime is still

as inextricably linked to economic and social marginalisation as it was during the 1980's.

The current multiparty democracy that has been created in South Africa, has not taken into account the social complexities of violent crime and as Simpson (1993: 7) asserts, insufficient attention has been given to socio-psychological aspects of violence whereby the assumption exists that if you can forge a political agreement, democratise the government structure and have a development program, you will overcome patterns of violence in that society. Violence is consequently a multifaceted quandary which needs to be assessed via a holistic evaluation strategy encompassing an ecosystemic ideology, whereby all systems inclusive of socio-economic, political, contextual and socio-psychological factors are comprehensively evaluated. The context of society has changed since the democratisation of the country in 1994 but unfortunately, severe socio-economic disparities and extreme poverty are still in existence. These contemporary and problematic dynamics have continued to subsist due to inequities in resource distribution and continued institutional instability. Hunt (2003: 2) postulates that this inequity situates South Africa as exhibiting one of the most imbalanced allotments of wealth in the world – boasting gleaming shopping centres on the one hand and town shops with derisory sanitation on the other. The bitter psychology of being poor in a wealthy environment breeds a desire for a better life - or a criminal one, and this socio-economic marginalisation in South Africa necessitates recognition and management, in order to address the patterns of violence in the country (Hunt, 2003: 2).

Schurink, *et al.* (2003: 3) assert that it is impossible to comprehensively discuss the various and numerous historical and socio-political dimensions of violence and crime in South Africa but certain trends outlined by Simpson (1993: 3-5) exist, that shed some light on the current pervasiveness and continued frequency of violence in the country over the past decade:

- During the transitional phase in South Africa's history, the failure or haphazard nature of the negotiation process, meant that alternative forms of consensus-based security or social regulation forces were not effectively forged, resulting in a period in our history whereby society was under

regulated by any legitimate source of authority. This generated and fuelled a climate of lawlessness, contributing to a spiral of revenge, retribution and increased violence over the year.<sup>7</sup>

- Violence has developed a momentum of its own whereby violence initially initiated by competing political groups in the early 1990's cannot simply now be switched off. This aspect has culminated and disseminated in a drastic increase in criminal violence.<sup>8</sup>
- Violence has been facilitated and accelerated by poverty, unemployment and conflict over scarce resources. This aspect continues to adversely influence a large portion of the South African population.
- There is a persistent and noticeable failure of the states law enforcement agencies to establish security, faith and trust-based relationships and violent attacks have hence become increasingly more arbitrary and random in nature. Whereas in the past, victims were more frequently politically selected there has been an upsurge of gangsterism and indiscriminate brutal attacks, including hijackings, rape and violent theft related transgressions.

These complex trends of violence in South Africa essentially personify the very heart of the nation's society and have become socio-culturally entrenched in the norms, beliefs, values and social structures of our humanity. Through these socio-political and socio-cultural classifications, the notion and practise of violence has been

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<sup>7</sup> This period of 'lawlessness' has resulted in the socially sanctioned use of violence to solve problems, retributive violence, displacement of aggression in the familial context, vigilantism and self-administered justice (Morris in Hamber, 2000: 12). Hamber (2000: 13) further asserts that this ongoing fear in society, not only disempowers the population but when violent action takes place, it seems to take the form of more drastic and extreme intervention typified by 'peoples justice' whereby, certain victims of past violence are at risk of becoming the perpetrators of retributive violence or displaced social and domestic violence.

<sup>8</sup> Stevens, *et al.*, (2001:148) highlight that the absence of structures, mechanisms and processes through which to voice legitimate political and social discontent often results in intrapersonal, interpersonal and criminal manifestations of violence. In this regard, political parties who mobilised and 'used' their supporters to violently uphold certain party policies and beliefs and who have subsequently failed to act upon false promises of housing, employment and general social upliftment, have by their narcissistic political exploits, indirectly perpetuated an increase in violent crime across the country. Individuals feel aggrieved at this lack of party action and a shortage of adequate social support systems.

continuously advocated, legitimised and sanctioned as a societal norm and as an acknowledged feature of South African culture. These real and coercive processes induce violent responses from individuals and groups, which in turn are met by violence from dominant factions, generating vicious spirals of ever-escalating violence and repression (McKendrick & Hoffman, 1990: 20).

These aspects discussed relate to socio-environmental, political, socio-economic and cultural concerns affecting the manifestation of violence in South African society. Intrinsically linked with these diverse and multifaceted considerations are socio-psychological factors, which dictate much of human functioning and behaviour. McKendrick and Hoffman (1990: 18) express these socio-psychological dynamics as involving interactions between persons and other people in their human environment, based on the values and attitudes generated by them. Socio-psychological arrangements hereby are concerned with interactions, attitudes and values held by familial institutions and attitudes of people in the wider environment which can ultimately legitimate violent behaviour as a valid means of social control, a means of achieving social alteration or as a natural reinforcement of macho and masculine values supported and justified by culturally entrenched, attitudes and ideals of family or societal systems.

In this regard, Schurink, *et al.* (2003: 26) additionally accentuate the impact and affiliation between family life and violent crime, indicating that the family establishment is in all probability, one of the strongest influences in a person's life and contributes enormously to an individual's decision to commit or abstain from crime and violence. Donald, *et al.* (2002: 259-260) endorse this notion and reinforce that the family is the primary place where an individual's social and emotional development is shaped, fortifying specific patterns of social behaviour and operating as the principal vehicle through which community and broader social values are incorporated and transmitted.

As Schurink, *et al.* (2003: 26) postulate, although family institutions in South Africa, have been eroded substantially by violence, crime and several related socio-economic factors, they still exist as indispensable units for successfully combating crime by reinforcing socially positive, respectful and peaceful concerns and values in children.



These attitudes assist in facilitating the decision of their offspring to reject crime and to start becoming responsible citizens.

Coleman and Deutch (1998: 1) hereby aptly assert that violence is a function of the interplay between personal and social factors and the result of the confluence of specific characteristics of the perpetrator (i.e. needs, expectations, impulse control, knowledge and attitudes) and the situation (i.e. norms, roles, culture, family, economy and context). This assessment encompasses an ecosystemic ideology where the individual is considered to be an active participant in their own development and whereby past experience and current level of psychological functioning have an effect on the person's interpretation of the situation. Subsequently, environmental stimuli possess the capacity to amplify or ameliorate behavioural tendencies and both sources of influence hereby may protect or render the individual vulnerable to the violent event (Van der Merwe & Dawes, 2000: 20).

Essentially therefore, violence in South African society has become a naturally occurring phenomenon with incredibly destructive capabilities. It has infiltrated the very substance of our culture and has resulted in a vicious and continuing cycle of oppression and fear, whereby our youth are engendered and socialised into an aggressive culture, situating violence as a normal and common feature of everyday life and as an acceptable function of social transformation and conflict resolution. Bearing this in mind, the ever increasing quandary of adolescent violence within the South African secondary schooling system will now be evaluated.

### **2.5.2 Adolescent violence in South African secondary schools**

Stevens, *et al.* (2001: 147) articulate that violence in South African schools encompasses a process that inhibits human growth, negates inherent potential, limits productive living and causes disability and death. Additional research into the impact of school violence reveals that children and youth directly exposed to the spectre of violence are at risk of psychological and social distress, acting out of behaviour, constraints to academic progress, a sense of impotence and helplessness and perceptions of constant threat to personal safety (Lockhat & Van Niekerk, 2000; Wyngaard, Van Niekerk, Bulbulia, Van der Walt, Masuku, Stevens & Seedat, 2000).

These barriers to learning incorporate real and incumbent fears experienced by learners in schools in South Africa, and are in conflict with the South African Constitution (Constitution of RSA, 1996: Act 108) and Bill of Rights (Constitution of RSA, 1996: Act 108) which contains diverse strategies and rights that are applicable to a safe educational environment, conducive to effectual teaching and learning (Prinsloo, 2005: 5). Schools should rather be characterised by an environment that is physically and psychologically safe and by an absence of crime and violence (Squelch, 2001: 149). Unfortunately as Sathiparsad (2003: 99) postulates, schools have progressively transformed into sites of violence for many South African children, impacting negatively on learners experiencing violence as victims, perpetrators or observers. These violent acts ultimately manifest in learners being marginalised or excluded and compound in the formation of an unhealthy and unproductive school environment which prevents many youth from developing their full potential to participate in society (Sathiparsad, 2003: 99).

Prinsloo (2005: 5) additionally identifies that the contemporary spate of violence in South African schools is in stark contradiction to the country's recent ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Organization of African Unity (OAU), 1990) and the effective implementation of the South African Constitution (Constitution of RSA, 1996: Act 108) whereby, a study of current headlines seem to indicate that children's rights are neither promoted nor protected in various schools.

South African secondary schools are particularly predisposed to being violent sites and Stevens, *et al.* (2001: 148) explain this predisposition, as being related to the fact that violent assault is especially pronounced among young male adolescents, with learners between the ages of 15–24 constituting the leading cause of death in this group. As secondary schools are predominantly occupied by learners in this age category, who are at critical developmental points in their lives regarding identity formation, the fragile and emerging social consciousness of adolescents renders them vulnerable as potential recipients and perpetrators of violence (Stevens, *et al.*, 2001: 148).



Furthermore, the prominence and pervasiveness of violence in South Africa and within the South African educational system, places adolescent youths in an exceedingly fragile predicament as positive emotional, social and educational development is critical during this stage and can be severely curtailed through the existence of civil conflict and the continued reverberation of violence in their lives. The male adolescent developmental stage is predominantly characterised by gender–role socialisation, issues of masculinity and influential peer group mechanisms. With regard to the latter, Killian and Govender (2001: 2) stress that families are no longer the primary support structure of adolescents and that moral and social support systems are provided by friends and siblings. Hereby, group identity configurations are also formulated predominantly within schooling structures and adolescent youths often attach individual meaning to violent related activity dependent on certain group variables and through the assimilation of particular peer group value and belief systems (Killian & Govender, 2001: 2).

Although adolescent girls are occasionally involved in acts of physical violence at school, their coping strategies are more emotionally focused and predicated on wishful thinking and acceptance (Killian & Govender, 2001: 7). Conversely, Dobson (2002: 34) asserts that boys are inherently, hormonally and neurologically wired to possess and exhibit more dominant, active and aggressive tendencies and explains that the increased prevalence of testosterone in males is responsible for what might be called ‘social dominance’. Supplementary to these biological predeterminants of dominant and aggressive tendencies, the pervasiveness of male authority and aggression is learnt from family modes of relating and societies’ glorification of ‘strong armed’ masculinity whereby men are taught to define their power in terms of their capacity to effect their will without the consent of those involved (Vogelman & Lewis, 1993: 3). The combined effects of a naturally occurring affinity to violence and institutionalised practises of violence, particularly within the South African education system, have culminated in severe male adolescent complexities regarding gender–role socialisation, masculinity and acceptable social behaviour.

Additionally, the following factors render male adolescents within the South African schooling structure susceptible to violent behaviour and activity:

- Dawes (1990: 18) proposes that as adolescent youths in South African schools are continually exposed to acts of violence they are likely to be induced into a process of learning and imitation, culminating in the acceptance of violent conduct as a dominant and normal mode of conflict resolution.
- With regards to the particular socio-cultural context in which adolescents reside and are exposed to in South Africa and within the South African schooling milieu, the aforementioned notion of a historically violent societal existence, cultural acceptance of violent events and hardened attitudes of aggression and hatred, result in a consequent socialisation into societal and educational establishments that perceive violence as being the only viable and 'masculine' means of resolving dispute (Sathiparsad, 2003: 100). Male adolescents in this country are sucked into this pernicious cycle of destruction, as contemporary and hazardous values and attitudes of South African society, legitimate violence as a means of social control. The cycle of violence that persists within South African society, is most often exercised in the secondary schooling system and is linked to aspects of masculinity, aggressive gender-role perceptions and the existence of negative peer influences. Unfortunately, the children and youth are the result of this disintegration of societal, educational and community life.
- Regarding socialised gender roles and masculinity, South African boys and male adolescent learners are socialised into being more militant and therefore, actively and often willingly participate in violent activity at school as part of a personally and socially affirming masculine role (Killian & Govender, 2001: 7). Adolescent males hereby, seek and gain appraisal from father figures and peers within the educational system and can attribute meaning to their experiences, thereby defining themselves and being defined by others as heroes (Killian & Govender, 2001: 7). Marlowe (1981: 210) asserts that our society is excessively gender-restrictive and possesses cultural meaning systems and institutions and practises such as schools, which promote violence as acceptable male behaviour and as a 'normalised' concept and phenomenon. Morrell (1998: 109) concludes that the democratic schooling system in South

Africa and particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, is threatened by intolerance and violence, as historically constructed gender inequalities, situating men as having to make important decisions, possessing physical toughness, resolving disputes by physical violence and making the best leaders, constantly convey messages that reinforce behaviour predicated on hostility, machismo and existing gender inequalities.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

South African society consists of a varied composition and merger of ethnicities and cultural systems which clearly possess differing perceptions of violent based behaviour. These cultural discrepancies were deliberately not explored as it was not the intention of the study to investigate aspects of cultural diversity regarding violent activity. The endemic nature of violence and intolerance that pervades the democratic schooling system in South Africa is however, a common feature of most schools in the country irrespective of cultural and ethnic diversity, and is hereby predicated on societal constructions of masculinity and gender that validate forms of anti-social and anti-democratic behaviour (Morrell, 1998: 104). Unfortunately, as violence is a systemic dilemma affected by a multifarious arrangement of interconnected systems, the provision of a rigid set of recommendations and structures to counteract and ultimately negate violent behavioural manifestations is excessively complicated. Societal, contextual, familial and individual subsystems form the basis upon which violent action is predicated. The specific effects of each system on individual behaviour is in turn, varied and vast, and differs from each unique contextual circumstance dependent on historical, societal and cultural variables. The intensely patriarchal and violent South African society makes it exceedingly difficult to impede the circular nature of aggression and hostility. The country's youth are hereby inculcated into a system where violence has been normalised and where constructs of male dominance and overt displays of hegemonic masculinity are inherited by the very society that is attempting to strive for future peace and stability.

The American Psychological Association Commission on Violence and Youth ([www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org) accessed on 9 December 2005) aptly sums up the situation as follows:

Rather than waiting until violence has been learned and practised and then devoting increased resources to hiring policemen, building more prisons, and sentencing three-time offenders to life imprisonment, it would be more effective to redirect the resources to early violence prevention programs, particularly for young children and adolescents.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

*“You have to show violence the way it is. If you don’t show it realistically, then that’s immoral and harmful. If you don’t upset people, then that’s obscenity.”*

Polanski

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will provide a comprehensive explanation of the research design and methods utilised during the data production and data analysis procedure to research male adolescents’ experiences of violence in an urban, private, secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal.

#### **3.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Violence is a universal phenomenon that is deeply entrenched in all spheres of most societies (Vogelman & Lewis, 1993: 1). The South African secondary schooling system is similarly plagued by violence and crime (cf. 2.5.2) and as the function of education in the prevention of violence is critical in the effective deliverance of an uninterrupted educational process and in terms of its developmental and socialisation role, the predicament of violence and aggression in South African secondary schools and its resultant negative impact on individuals and society at large, needs to be explored and researched. The research questions can be formulated as follows:

- What are male adolescents’ experiences of violence in an urban, private, secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal?
- What specific recommendations and guidelines can be generated to assist educators to counteract violence amongst male adolescents within the South African secondary schooling system?

### **3.3 RESEARCH AIMS**

The primary aim of the research is to explore male adolescents' experiences of violence within the urban, private and secondary educational system in KwaZulu-Natal. The secondary aim of the study is to generate recommendations and detailed guiding principles, in an effort to assist educators in offsetting violence amongst South African male adolescent learners in the secondary schooling system.

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **3.4.1 Introduction**

The study made use of a qualitative, explorative, descriptive and contextual research design (Mouton & Marais, 1990: 159–163) to investigate the experiences of violence among male adolescent, private, secondary school learners. The compositional structure of the design therefore embraced an interpretivist paradigm. Lynch (2004: 2) describes the interpretive paradigm as being:

An alternative paradigm, where it is seen as impossible to separate facts from values, and whereby the inherent subjectivity in any research conducted in relation to people and the social world, is accepted.

Therefore, as knowledge is perceived as a social construction, rather than the discovery of an independently existing reality, the notion of causality is defined differently. Rather than following the conception of causality as one variable preceding and causing another, interpretivism sees relationships as more complex and fluid, with directions of influence being mutual and shifting rather than unidirectional and fixed (Lynch, 2004: 2). As Travis (1999: 1042) states, the interpretivist paradigm follows an ontological approach premised on relativism and inductive logic, whereby researchers study meaningful social action and gather large quantities of detailed qualitative data to acquire an in-depth understanding of how meaning is created in every day life in the real-world.

An analysis of this nature required a qualitative form of inquisition as the researcher was exposed to a miscellaneous array of external and individual variables with respect to subtle variations in participants' age, individual identity, personality, ethnicity, and exposure to violent behaviour. Furthermore, the decision to conduct the study from the participants' experiences of violence specifically lent itself to a qualitative form of inquiry whereby the experiences and interpretation of violence by male adolescents would be given primary consideration. The multiple benefits of using this qualitative mode of investigation are summarily acknowledged below.

### **3.4.2 The qualitative research approach**

Qualitative research is a complex research strategy that ultimately exposes the researcher to a multiplicity of assumptions concerning human behaviour. In clarification of this statement, Merriam (1998: 17) highlights that qualitative research assumes numerous contextual realities – identifying the world as a highly subjective phenomenon and function of personal interaction and perception. Ely (1991:4) postulates that due to the complexity in defining the term 'qualitative research' it can be adequately evaluated and appreciated by the characteristics of its methods rather than by a single definition. In this respect, an analysis by Sherman and Webb (1988: 5-8) outlines five characteristics of qualitative inquiry similar to all forms of qualitative research:

- Events can only be adequately understood if they are seen in context. A qualitative researcher hereby immerses himself/herself in the setting.
- The contexts of inquiry are not contrived; they are natural. Nothing is predefined or taken for granted.
- Qualitative research is an interactive process in which the participants being studied provide their perspectives in words and actions. The participants hereby 'teach' the researcher about their lives.



- Qualitative research attends to the experience as a whole, not as separate variables. The aim of the research is to therefore understand unified experience.
- The process entails appraisal about what was studied.

The research strategy employed hereby utilised a case study, as the investigation involved one unit of analysis, a private, urban, secondary school, and included the intensive study of individuals (Huysamen, 2001: 168). Whereas research concerned with hypothesis-testing, deals with the general, case studies are directed at the understanding of the uniqueness and the idiosyncrasy of a particular case in all its complexities (Huysamen, 2001: 168). Patton (2002: 14) identifies the strengths of this type of qualitative inquiry, describing the investigation as facilitating a study of multifarious concerns, in depth and detail, without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis. Furthermore, qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of comprehensive information about a small number of cases, hereby increasing the extent of understanding the cases and situations studied but reducing generalizability often negatively associated with quantitative approaches (Patton, 2002: 14).

The qualitative research approach was therefore selected as it was based upon the following specific criteria:

- ***Inductive reasoning*** - compelling the researcher to understand a particular situation without imposing pre-existing expectations on the setting being explained. In this manner a conceptual framework was built through initial and specific observation, dimensions of analysis and the organisation and explanation of conceptual and categorical components, from the data itself (Ferreira, 1990: 204).
- ***First-hand knowledge*** – Lofland (1971: 3-4) asserts that qualitative methods involving participant observation and in-depth interviewing, enable the researcher to obtain primary information about the specific situational, individual and environmental factors being studied.



- ***Holistic approach*** – lastly, qualitative research adopts a holistic approach whereby the assumption exists that the context is critical and essential for understanding a particular situation. This furthermore allowed for evaluating circumstances from the perspective of participants in the situation and conceptualising individuals as active agents in constructing and making sense of realities that they encountered (Ferreira, 1990: 204).

The qualitative research approach is hereby closely linked to and compatible with the ecosystemic theoretical framework appointed in conducting the study. Due to the nature of the qualitative research approach previously outlined, allowance was afforded for the depiction of real life situations and the provision of comprehensive coverage of the experiences of the male adolescent participants, involved in the research.

Unlike the restrictive and predetermined attributes of a quantitative study whereby the researcher attempts to transpose a certain structure onto a phenomenon, the qualitative approach employed allowed the phenomenon to ‘speak for itself’ or stated differently, the phenomenon as it existed revealed itself and the researcher registered it (Mouton & Marais, 1990: 163). Due to the nature of qualitative research whereby experiences of a phenomenon such as violence in a secondary school are explored and recorded by the researcher for further analysis, the critical aspect of ‘trustworthiness’, involving neutrality and fairness of procedure and process, was required.

### **3.4.3 Trustworthiness**

Ely (1991: 93) asserts that being trustworthy as a qualitative researcher requires that the process of the research is carried out fairly and that the products represent, as closely as possible, the experiences of the people who are studied. Trustworthiness is hereby viewed by Ely (1991: 93) as more than just a set of procedures but rather a personal belief system that shapes the procedures in process. With this philosophy in mind, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985: 172) model to ensure trustworthiness of qualitative research was therefore utilised, which enabled the researcher to ensure rigour without sacrificing the relevance of the qualitative investigation (Poggenpoel, 1998: 348). The

four criteria of trustworthiness as outlined by Guba (1981: 215–216) and how they were applied, are outlined below:

- **Truth value:** This aspect ascertains whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings, for the participants and the context in which the study occurred. In qualitative research, truth value is primarily obtained from the discovery of human experiences as they are lived and perceived by the informants. This is termed by Lincoln and Guba (1985: 174) as ‘credibility’ and encompasses the most important criterion for the assessment of qualitative research. Credibility is established through the researcher spending informal time with the participants and this ‘prolonged engagement’ gives the participants sufficient time to become accustomed to the researcher, providing them with the confidence to reveal and represent their life stories and experiences pertinent to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 174)

In order to enhance the credibility of the study, the process of triangulation was affected. Triangulation is described by De Vos (1998: 341-342) as taking multiple measures of the same phenomenon and observing a phenomenon from different angles or viewpoints, in order to take full cognisance of its intricate and multiple components. Furthermore, Ely (1991: 97) postulates that triangulation involves convergence of at least two pieces of data and can occur with data gathered by the same method but accumulated over time. In this investigation, information obtained from the participants via the interview process, was assimilated and cross-referenced with the Head of Department of Discipline at the institution, who also assisted in identifying male adolescent learners who had recently been exposed to violent activity. More importantly, a procedure of reflexive triangulation (Patton, 2002: 64-66) whereby the qualitative inquirer focused on the importance of his self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness and ownership of his perspective, was constantly respected, emphasised and adhered to by the researcher.

- **Applicability:** This refers to the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and other settings or with other groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 174). As this investigation involved a qualitative research strategy that was conducted in a naturalistic locale with minimal controlling variables, the capacity to generalise was irrelevant, as each situation is defined as unique and thus less amenable to generalisation, when using this approach. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 174) refer therefore to the concept of transferability, as the measure against which applicability of qualitative data is assessed. This facet relates to the degree of similarity or correspondence between two contexts and is satisfied as long as the original researcher presents sufficient descriptive data to allow comparison to the original study.

The distinguishing characteristics of applicability and transferability were addressed via the process of sample selection, whereby the participants were specifically selected based on age, gender and recent exposure to violent based school activity. The selected individuals had the capacity to offer valuable insight into the issue of violence among adolescents and hence conclusions deducted vis-à-vis this specific study, may be transferable insofar as criteria regarding participant selection, type of educational institution and data collection and assimilation techniques employed, are congruent with the original investigation and have been sufficiently described.

- **Consistency:** This principle considers the consistency of the data related to whether the findings would be consistent if the inquiry were replicated with the same participants or in a similar context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 175). As qualitative research is concerned with multiple realities and variation in human experience and interpretation, the notion of producing equivalency and uniformity when replicating the study was no longer relevant. For this reason Guba (1981: 83) states that consistency in respect of the qualitative study is defined as dependability, whereby variability can be ‘tracked’ back and ascribed to identified sources. Dependability was hereby satisfied via cross-referencing with other studies of a comparable and analogous nature.

- **Neutrality:** This refers to the degree to which the findings are solely a function of the informants and conditions of the research, and not of other biases, motivations and preconceived perspectives. The emphasis on neutrality in a qualitative analysis is shifted from the researcher to the data, whereby the neutrality of the data is given consideration over neutrality of the investigator (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 176). In this way, the notion of confirmability is offered as the criterion of neutrality which is in turn achieved when truth value and applicability is established.

Patton (2002: 51) concludes that any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopts a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomenon under scrutiny. Consequently, for the duration of this study, the researcher adopted a neutral outlook and executed analysis without a predisposition to manipulate data or to verify a particular perspective. Rather, his commitment maintained an appreciation of the environment as it unfurled, truthfulness regarding the emergence of complexities and multiple realities and balance in reporting confirmatory or disconfirming evidence with respect to any conclusions offered (Patton, 2002: 51). Consequently, the integrity and credibility of the researcher regarding independence and neutrality, was constantly upheld throughout the duration of the study.

## **3.5 METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY**

### **3.5.1 Introduction**

This qualitative investigation was ultimately concerned with adolescents' experiences of violence in the urban, private and secondary schooling milieu. Subsequently, not only did the study strive to gain a clearer perception of violent behaviour among these learners, but sought to engender recommendations and guidelines for educators in assisting adolescent perpetrators, victims and witnesses of violent activity. A qualitative research approach was deemed the most compatible perspective to effectively obtain and interpret data related to the effect of violence on learners within this particular educational phase. Huysamen (2001:

168) affirms that the objective of this type of qualitative case study usually implicates the provision of an intensive and holistic depiction and analysis of a single bounded phenomenon; typically of a social nature, such as a family, individual, institution, process or community. This research method therefore does not require management of behavioural events but rather investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, when the boundaries between the observable facet and context overlap and in which multiple sources of evidence are utilised (Yin, 1984: 156–157).

The analytical units of Lofland (1971: 87) were employed in the inquiry to gain ‘intimate familiarities’ with the setting, participants and the research itself. These qualitative and analytical units as outlined by Lofland (1971: 13) were considered and accounted for in the investigation and are set out as follows:

- **Acts**, which are temporally brief;
- **activities**, which are acts of longer duration and constitute significant elements of participants’ involvement in a setting;
- **meanings**, which incorporate the verbal production of participants that define and direct action;
- **participation**, entailing the holistic involvement in or adaptation to the situation or setting of participants;
- **relationships**, which are the interrelationships between participants considered simultaneously and
- **the setting**, encompassing the entire locale of the study.

These units informed the inquiry as they enabled the researcher to focus analytically on the investigative process, which required a holistic investigation due to the interdependent and interconnected components of its constitution. Through the incorporation and critical analysis of the components of violent encounters in temporal terms; taking cognisance of the inherent meanings attached by the participants, which define and direct their actions; becoming intensely immersed in the contextual setting of the study in order to gain an intimate sense of their experiences within a particular social system and by simultaneously examining the

interrelationship between participants, the researcher was equipped to establish factual, descriptive and perceptive associations which facilitated the understanding and reconstruction of individuals' perceptions as realistically and as faithfully as possible (Ferreira, 1982: 205-207).

### **3.5.2 The school context**

Adolescent violence and its concurrent negative effects are experienced throughout the South African schooling system and continues to exist as a significant public health issue affecting young people's safety, quality of life and educational progress (Swart & Stevens, 2002: 57). The investigation was conducted at a private, secondary educational institution in KwaZulu-Natal. Furthermore, the school is a co-educational institution that educates approximately 500 learners. As it is private in nature and situated in an affluent residential context, it caters for a socio-economically stable community. The composition of both educators and learners at the school, are racially and ethnically diverse and the school utilises English as the primary and sole medium of instruction. The discipline structure is headed by the Principal and the Head of Department of Discipline, in collaboration with the staff that have valuable input as far as deviant behaviour is concerned. The primary reason motivating the selection of the school concerned was that the researcher was an educator at the school and thus in close contact with learners in the institution. In this regard, the Head of Discipline assisted in the identification of learners who had recently experienced violent based activity involving bullying, peer pressure and physical aggression and consequently provided valuable insight into the selection of the sample group. Gaining consent from the participants and their parents was unproblematic.

### **3.5.3 The sample**

Selection of participants was intentionally limited to male, adolescent learners in the secondary phase for two reasons:

- **Predisposition of sample group:** Research has indicated (McKendrick & Hoffman, 2002: 261; Swart, *et al.*, 1999: 13; Butchart, *et al.*, 1996: 132) that male adolescents in South Africa have historically displayed a tendency and

penchant for participating in or committing acts of violence in secondary schools.

- **The benefits of purposeful sampling:** Huysamen (2001: 44) defines purposeful sampling as a technique whereby researchers rely on their experience, ingenuity and/or previous research findings to deliberately obtain participants in such a manner that the sample obtained may provide rich data concerning the relevant population. The notion of purposeful sampling employed in the study, has multiple benefits and the logic and power of its method is described by Patton (2002: 46) as emphasising an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon rather than the notion of generalisation associated with probability sampling and the quantitative methodology. Purposeful sampling thus involves the selection of information-rich cases for study in order to learn a great deal about the issues occupying central importance to the rationale of the research and illuminating the questions under investigation (Patton, 2002: 46).

Suitable participants were systematically identified in collaboration with the Head of Department of Discipline at the institution. Nine male adolescent learners between the ages of 13 and 19 were interviewed and contributed to the study through the verbal disclosure of their experiences of violence. The sole basis for selection of participants was reliant upon their recent involvement in violent based activity. All participants possessed the ability to converse freely and fluently in English. This cross-section of participants is indicated on the subsequent page in tabular form:



<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Mother tongue</b>
Participant 1	17	11	Coloured	English
Participant 2	14	8	Indian	English
Participant 3	14	8	White	English
Participant 4	14	9	White	English
Participant 5	13	8	Black	isiZulu
Participant 6	15	10	Black	isiZulu
Participant 7	15	9	Indian	English
Participant 8	16	10	White	English
Participant 9	17	11	Coloured	English

### **3.5.4 Data collection process**

After successful identification and selection of participants and the provision of consent by all parties concerned, the data collection process was enacted through the utilisation of the phenomenological, in-depth interview (Schurink, 1998: 300). This interview technique is explained below.

#### **3.5.4.1 The phenomenological interview**

The phenomenological interview technique was selected upon intense consideration of the following factors:

- Ely (1991: 58) postulates that the phenomenological interview is at the heart of contextual, qualitative research as it seeks the words of the people being studied, so that the researcher can understand their situations with increasing clarity. The major purpose of an in-depth interview is to therefore learn to see the world from the eyes of the person being interviewed (Ely, 1991: 58). The assertion exists and remains hereby that the researcher must not manipulate the interview flow but merely probe, listen, support, observe and remain sensitive to clues provided by the participants (Ely, 1991: 58-62).



In order to unearth valuable information from the participants, the study made use of one question, namely: “Could you tell me of your experiences of violence in school?”(Appendix A). The participants were allowed to speak freely of their experiences and the narration was occasionally guided to ensure that the data collected, could contribute to the research objectives. Seven of the participants were English speaking whilst two were first language isiZulu learners. The latter were very capable of conversing fluently in English and hereby the service of an interpreter was not required.

- Patton (2002: 246) points to the necessity in qualitative interviewing of capturing the actual words of the interviewee, there being no substitute for the raw data of actual quotations spoken by the participants.

The duration of the interviews ranged between 15 and 30 minutes and the participants’ responses to the research question were audio-taped and transcribed later in the investigative process (Appendix B). The participants were furthermore reassured that the audio-taped information would be used for research purposes only and that their anonymity would be strictly protected and their confidentiality ensured. The use of an audiotape device was particularly beneficial in that it allowed the researcher to immerse himself fully into the interview process and maintain every endeavour to provide guidance and direction when required to listen, probe, prompt and when necessary, guide the participants back to the interview question.

- Schurink (1998: 300) describes the advantages of the phenomenological interview as being closely related to the objectives of qualitative methodology, namely that reality can be reconstructed from the world of the interviewee. Another important advantage recognised by Schurink (1998: 300) is that socially and personally sensitive topics such as deviant behaviour can be more openly discussed.

As the concept of violence and its consequent negative manifestations, represented a personally and socially sensitive issue, the establishment of trust

through the formation of an interview milieu, possessing optimally favourable conditions and mutual confidence, was ensured (Schurink, 1998:303). The additional concepts highlighted by Schurink (1998: 300-304) involving acquaintance, establishment of a contractual relationship and the assurance of an affiliation based on trust, were issues of minimal complication as the relationship between the researcher and participants had historically been successfully fashioned, as the researcher was an educator at the school under investigation.

### **3.5.5 Data analysis**

Ely (1991: 86) states that the data analysis procedure incorporates an ongoing, intertwined process that connotes personal control, personal responsibility and creativity that is activated with the very first log notation. Bearing this qualitative ideology in mind, the researcher additionally employed a descriptive analysis technique as outlined by Tesch (1990: 154-156), subsequent to the transcription and analysis of the audio-taped interviews. The *modus operandi* of the data analysis was strictly applied by the researcher and based on Tesch's (1990: 154-156) technique the analysis procedure was enacted as follows:

- The researcher initially read through the interview transcriptions thoroughly, jotting down notes and comments where required;
- The 'richest' and 'thickest' interview was specifically selected and perceptions encompassing the underlying meaning in the information was recorded;
- Once all the interviews had been selected and dealt with in a similar fashion, a list was compiled of all the topics. Similar topics were then clustered together and fashioned into columns that were arranged into major, unique and leftover focal points;
- These topics were subsequently abbreviated as codes and written next to the corresponding segments of text;
- The topics were then ascribed descriptive headings or phraseology and converted into categories. The list of categories was reduced by grouping

analogous topics under compatible headings, and lines were drawn signifying interrelationships;

- Each category was then abbreviated and assigned a particular alphabetic code;
- The data material representative of each category was assembled and a preliminary analysis was performed;
- Existing data was recoded if necessary.

The data analysis procedure encompassed a stringent and methodical process that demonstrated the importance of applying a rigid and structured analysis approach. It is a time consuming but critical research process that entails homogeneity and uniformity in order to secure accurate information related to the area of study, which in this instance were the experiences of violence among male adolescent learners in the secondary school.

### **3.5.6 Recontextualisation and literature control**

Subsequent to the analytical procedure, a literature control was executed in order to consign the results in the context of established and reputable knowledge and to ensure the identification of results supported by the literature or that claimed unique contributions to the specific domain of investigation (Poggenpoel, 1998: 342). The literature control consequently highlighted both similarities and differences between the area of research, current scholarly perceptions and contemporary academic evaluations.

### **3.5.7 Ethical considerations**

Mason (2002: 41) asserts that qualitative researchers should be as concerned to produce a moral or ethical research design as we are to generate an intellectually coherent and compelling one. This does not only imply that data generation and analysis be performed morally but also prescribes an ethical research plan and question frame (Mason, 2002: 41). There was a constant and additional awareness of the potential controversy and sensitivity of the research, regarding experiences of

violence amongst the participants. The practical and inherent ethical and moral considerations outlined below, were therefore applied stringently and effectively:

- Application for research clearance from the Department of Education was submitted prior to the study being conducted (Appendix C).
- An ethical clearance approval form and number was completed and obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Appendix D).
- Signed consent forms were received from the participants, parents/guardians and Principal of the school (Appendixes E and F).
- Moral and ethical concerns previously outlined, regarding the interview process, data analysis, disposal of data and research question were consistently monitored and respected.
- Participants were constantly made aware of every procedure and practise that they were involved in.

### **3.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

There were no transparent limitations of the study. The fact that the topic of research was controversial did not seem to restrain participants from discussing freely their experiences of violence with the researcher. Furthermore the language issue was uncomplicated as all participants could effortlessly converse in English and a translator was not required. The study is limited to male, adolescent learners in the school who were sourced in collaboration with the Head of Department of Discipline at the institution.

### **3.7 CONCLUSION**

Chapter three effectively identified the benefits and applicability of the selected research design, and established the suitability and positive aspects of utilising a

qualitative research approach. Furthermore, the methodological strategy, outlining the data collection and analysis procedure was discussed in detail, ensuring the provision of sufficient information for replication of the study. Chapter four will highlight and discuss the prevalent themes obtained from the assimilated responses and data of the participants, in relation to the South African context and literature review.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THEMES

*“The moment a man claims a right to control the will of a fellow being by physical force, he is at heart a slaveholder.”*

Henry C. Wright

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The results of the study will be presented in this chapter and have been collated into specific themes acquired from the participants' responses as they emerged from the researcher's analysis of the transcribed data. The themes will be discussed and evaluated in relation to the South African context and the literature review.

#### 4.2 RESULTS

The thematic analysis of the data, yielded several salient considerations across the narratives of the nine participants, establishing apparent commonalities between the learners' experiences of violence in the urban, private, secondary school. Three specific themes were identified and selected based on applicability, appropriateness to the investigation and commonality of perception between the participants. The themes are as follows:

- Masculinity and power as a societal influence on violence
- Violence underpinned by male identity formation and gender-role socialisation in schools
- The coercion of peer pressure

## 4.3 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### 4.3.1 Masculinity and power as a societal influence on violence

Upon an examination of the responses, it was particularly apparent that the majority of the participants had inadvertently been socialised into a 'culture' and system of violence that has historically sanctioned and normalised aggressive behaviour and destructive tendencies as natural and 'manly'. In this regard, several participants were unable to adequately provide explanations for their use of violence, suggesting that the actual violent act needed little stimulation or motivation to surface, implying a largely unexplained, uncontrollable and violently instinctive response to conflict. This inability on behalf of individuals to offer explanations for their use of violence, leads to the creation of emotional turmoil as aptly expressed by this participant:

*"I don't know why, Sir. It was like...and then afterwards, when I was going to bed last night, It was like...Are you stupid? Why do you just hit the guy? I like didn't have a clue."*

These overt displays of aggressive tendencies appear therefore, to be inextricably linked to a cultural and societal ratification of violence that has been inherited by male adolescent youths in the country and that largely utilises the secondary educational structure as its primary source of release.

Stevens, *et al.* (2001: 146) ascertain that several socio-historical factors require consideration insofar as violence within the South African education system is concerned. Provided that extreme injustices and social segregation existed in the past, resulting in the establishment of severe racial and ethnic inequality (cf. 2.5.1), violence has evolved throughout the multifarious and critical political and social transitions of the country, ultimately being defined and articulated predominantly as a political problem, the antecedents of which are firmly embedded in the socio-economic and political inequities embodied and espoused by Apartheid (Stevens, *et al.*, 2001: 146). As Vogelmann and Lewis (1993: 5) assert, the term 'culture of violence' is often used in South Africa, to explain and appropriately illustrate the



country's heightened incidence of violence and aggression. This violence is excessively prominent and physically and psychologically affects large segments of the populace. The youth are particularly afflicted as they are emotionally predisposed to being psychologically distressed as witnesses to violent actions and events. In this respect, one of the participants verbalises his apprehension and fear regarding violence that he has witnessed:

*"...at night...there could be stabbings and everything. 'Cause when violence doesn't happen to you...it is very scary."*

Violence has historically and consistently been endorsed and inculcated as an acceptable and major part of the South African culture and the youth of the country are hereby systematically exposed to and socialised into a system that collectively legitimises and normalises violence and overt masculine solutions to conflict, as the natural transformation of power relations between men (Workman, 1993: 32). Male adolescents are predominantly vulnerable to societal institutions of violence (cf. 2.5.2) where aggression is engendered and inculcated into their individual identity and hereby internalised into their personal belief and value system. This ideological structure propagates and promotes violence and hostility, as an acceptable and masculine mode of resolving conflict and promoting male dominance.

Therefore, growing up in a climate of widespread conflict whereby persistent acts of violence are likely to induce a process of learning and imitation, ultimately culminates in the acceptance of violent conduct, as a dominant and normal occurrence, and children are either emotionally scarred by their experiences (Killian & Govender, 2001: 1) or in turn, participate in destructive and violent behaviour as a consequence of imitation or as a coping mechanism against fear and isolation (cf. 2.4.3.1). Two of the participants elicited responses that indicated an inherent 'will' to participate in violent activity that was inexplicable and unexplainable:

*"Something just welled up inside of me and I just like hit him."*

*"...he said something to me and then I just clicked and...lashed out at him."*

These violent reactions and responses of the participants, are characterised by an inability to succinctly and accurately pin-point the origin of their violent feelings and actions. Rather, their violent behaviour appeared intuitive, instinctive and natural and culminated in pathological type behaviour that appeared socially, inherently and internally governed and manipulated.

Social systems such as educational institutions are hereby intrinsically involved in constructing and negotiating issues of masculinity and male dominance (cf. 2.4.3.3.1) which are interdependently linked to male adolescent manifestations of violence (cf. 2.5.2). Luyt and Foster (2001: 2) postulate that dominant notions of masculinity or hegemonic masculinity constructions represent an unremitting collective practise that serves to gain individual's access to power and privilege, as well as reinforcing structural relations of domination. Morrell (1998: 608) aptly describes hegemonic masculinity as:

A concept which provides a way of explaining that although a number of masculinities coexist, a particular version of masculinity holds sway, bestowing power and privilege on men who espouse it and claim it as their own.

Subsequently, the notion of hegemony as an ongoing social practise, supporting and reproducing particular structured relations of supremacy, accommodates its socio-historical analysis, whereby individuals are conceptualised as active social agents in the construction and accomplishment of masculinity (Coleman, 1990: 170-199). Masculinities, hegemony and dominant power-plays are witnessed and asserted from the moment that boys begin their formal education (cf. 2.4.3.3.1) and are social mechanisms that are particularly prominent upon entering the secondary educational sphere. In this way, masculinity is created and recreated via the social order and social practises of the education system in such a way that the school as a social organisation actively reinforces and sustains constructions of masculinity through various interacting gender regimes (cf. 2.4.3.3.1).

Two of the participants attributed their violent actions to socially constructed masculinity compositions as these responses indicate:

*“...it was more like a reputation thing. I couldn’t run away because the o’s would have said something to me.”*

*“I wasn’t going to turn and run away...I didn’t want to look scared in front of them.”*

These responses are indicative of the fact that appropriate male and masculine behaviour and resolution of conflict, lies in the assertion of male individual dominance and power. The participants felt that they would have faced ridicule, exclusion and humiliation, leading to the consequent disestablishment of masculine prowess so sought after amongst male adolescent learners. Their solution therefore, was to fight, irrespective of personal adversity and fear, as a testimony to their masculinity. In this respect, conflict among male adolescents is seen to manifest in a context whereby one learner must win and the other lose. This aggressive and stereotypical mindset can once again be attributed to the patriarchal<sup>1</sup>, male dominated culture of hostility and aggression that South African men have historically promoted (cf. 2.5.1). Rather than attempting to resolve conflict through negotiation, male adolescents are socially and culturally pressurised into reverting to the ‘macho’ and male appropriate institute of violence to solve disputes. Boys who fail to conform to these obscenely masculine stereotypes are likely to be victimised, ostracised and bullied (Leach, 2003b; Morrell, 1998).

The centrality and importance of male dominance and masculinity therefore pervades all areas of South African society and its critical nature is suitably qualified by this particular response from one of the participants:

*“I have a reputation in Grade 9 as a tough guy and stuff...so I was going to hold my position.”*

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<sup>1</sup> The African National Congress defines South Africa’s social system as a patriarchal structure whereby the system is essentially characterised by male domination and control at all levels of society based on socially constructed notions of masculinity, gender roles and gender relations ([www.anc.org](http://www.anc.org) accessed on 9 November 2005).

Male adolescent youths are constantly subjected to socio-structural and societal relations that are premised on these dominant pedagogies and men in general have hereby been culturally and socially influenced and provided with status and unequal power, encompassing patriarchal control and ideologically sanctioned practises of violence and aggression. As indicated therefore, several participants felt the pressure of masculinity and social standing and feared that their reputation as ‘males’ would be threatened if they turned away from potentially violent situations.

#### **4.3.2 Violence underpinned by male identity formation and gender-role socialisation in schools**

The protection of male identity and status, including compliance to specifically acceptable male behavioural traits, featured high on the agenda of most participants. In this regard, it was apparent from several responses that the participants felt pressure to behave in a manner that upheld notions of masculinity, power and male dominance. This pressure appears to pervade the educational institution that they attend and is inadvertently borne out via sporting tradition, reinforcement of male values and peer relations (cf. 2.4.3.3.2). The participants expressed a need to participate in violence which transcended the school’s authority and discipline structures and which they viewed would elevate and preserve their male social status in the eyes of their peers. The importance of maintaining male identity status and acceptable gender specific behaviour is highlighted by this particular participants’ response:

*“Sometimes you just have to fight to maintain your reputation...even if you are going to get caught and punished. I don’t want to be regarded as a woosie (softie).”*

The aspect of socially organised masculinity and entrenched societal norms of violence and male dominance, are closely linked to facets of gender-role socialisation and male identity formation in the educational sphere. Connell (1995: 3) states that if everyday life is understood as an arena of gender politics, then these realities constructed from the early stages of life, mean susceptibility to particular understanding of gender relations, values and social power, drawn from the existing constitution of social organisations such as families, schools and the media. Grieshaber (1998: 19) further asserts that these socially predicated meanings of

suitable and institutionalised gender behaviour are forever limited by arrangements of social relations, operating at a particular time and place and represented through a variety of discourses. Subsequently, contextually specific discourses constitute and classify social relations, in institutions such as families and schools (Grieshaber, 1998: 19).

Individuals are therefore seen to involve themselves in gendered activity informed - at each specific moment across time and space - through both their particular contextual positioning, as well as their location in broader cultural and ideological structures (Connell, 1995: 82). In this regard, Connell (in Luyt & Foster, 2001: 2) identifies that male gender practise is largely determined by and intrinsically associated through its relationship with the cultural ideal of masculinity, varying over context as a consequence of changing structural features, and re-negotiated in order to maintain existing relations of domination.

As the societal and contextual climate that is infused within South Africa and South African schools, comprises a patriarchal system predicated on male dominance and control, male identity formation and gender-role socialisation, are comprehensively influenced by a system based on violence, aggression, hegemony and male superiority (cf. 2.5.2). The susceptibility of male adolescent youths hereby renders them vulnerable to violent institutional arrangements that endorse violence as an acceptable component of male behaviour and as a normalised method of resolving conflict as a means of protecting male dominance and social standing. The schooling system is hereby a critical constituent as a socialising agent in the lives of male adolescents and possesses the capacity to either ameliorate or exacerbate violent tendencies in youth through formation of gender relations predicated via organisational structure, sport and individual peer relationships (cf. 2.4.3.3.2).

In this regard, two of the participants express this aggressive ideology as being a natural and socialised feature of their personal belief and value system:

*“Most of my fights have been based on reputation and just to maintain my reputation.”*

*“If someone provokes you then they deserve to get hit...It is like an ego thing...”*

The comments made, further highlight the fact that violence amongst adolescent males in South Africa, is a fundamental constituent of male domination, male identity formation and general preservation of masculine values and behaviours. In addition, South African society and the organisational and discipline structures of schools, regard violence as a permissible and natural occurrence that is an inevitable element of male adolescent behaviour. In this regard, South African male adolescents' establishment of 'gender-roles', which refers to overt behaviour that signifies one's identity in the eyes of others (Marlowe, 1981: 210), is intended to reproduce behaviour that characterises strength, machismo and ascendancy. Marlowe (1981: 212) further assesses that the South African culture encourages children to conform to idealised generalisations of what boys should be, and rather than being permitted to develop their own adaptive and personally meaningful strategies, boys are forced into rigid gender typed behaviours. It is with these culturally aggressive behaviours and against this backdrop of violence that young people are learning about and adapting what they see as conventional male and female behaviour. Boys are learning that the violence that they witness in the wider society is acceptable even within institutional structures such as schools, where they are supposed to acquire social responsibility, tolerance and respect for others (Leach, 2003b: 389).

Responses from two of the participants indicate a general lack of reverence for policy and regulatory systems which pervade educational systems and significantly identify a lack of fear and respect for institutional conventions:

*“...he deserved to get hit...I was not worried about what would happen to me afterwards.”*

*“...the prefects were there...but we didn't care...we just kept punching each other.”*

Educational institutions therefore represent critical systems in the control and neutralisation of violent behaviour among male adolescents. At this formative age, it is very easy for learners to develop the view that male identity formation is associated with aggression and violence as means of establishing oneself in the eyes of the male



peer group (Leach, 2003b: 390). The school ethos, organisational structure and responsibilities allocated to appropriate role models (Davies, 1992: 127-136) is essential in encouraging boys to pursue less dominant and violent resolutions to personal difficulties and conflict situations.

#### **4.3.3 The coercion of peer pressure**

Negative peer pressure to participate in violent acts and to conform to notions of male dominance and control, is an aspect of concern amongst the participants. Participant responses indicate several instances where they were urged and coerced into acting violently. Once again, the pressure placed on individuals to conform to 'macho' type behaviour appears to be intense, and the participants felt a necessity to behave aggressively in order to sustain their social standing as part of the 'popular' group. Negative peer pressure appears to be alive and flourishing in this particular institution and is a prevailing force in the frequency of violent acts as this participants' response indicates:

*"It is exciting and terrifying when everyone is around you cheering you on...You have no option but to fight or you will get laughed at...there is nothing more embarrassing than that!"*

Adler and Adler (1998: 56) purport that a dominant feature of children's lives is the clique structure that organises their social world. These cliques consist of members who tend to identify with one another as mutually connected, and are premised on a hierarchical arrangement of dominance, incorporating the most popular individuals, offering the most exciting social lives and commanding the most interest and attention from classmates. Peer pressure therefore represents a powerful component of adolescent experience and mobilises powerful forces that produce important effects on individuals and their actions.

During adolescence peer relations expand to occupy a central role in adolescent lives and teenagers encounter multiple peer relationships and confront numerous 'peer cultures' that have remarkably differing norm and value systems (Lingren, 1995: 1). Unfortunately, due to the entrenched culture of violence in South Africa, societal and



educational spheres and most peer cultures are characterised by aggression, hostility and hegemony. Coupled with the prevalence of school-based violence and an endeavour to impress the peer group in an attempt to gain acceptance and status in the eyes of friends, the individual will often resort to violence, even though it might not be part of his personal belief and value system. This aspect is accurately conveyed by the following response from one of the participants:

*“At school...it is not like you really want to fight but it is the peer pressure.”*

Phillips (1993: 82) ascertains that those individuals who find themselves on the outside are easy meat for recruitment into peer groups and gangs, where rules of loyalty are clear and attachment to someone big and tough, brings with it a sense of security in a shifting and terrifying world. Boys are subsequently more susceptible to peer manipulation (cf. 2.4.3.3.3) and through rigid association and peer monitoring, inculcate gender appropriate behaviour which, in South African schools, is largely premised on violence and domination. The consequent interrelationship between peer pressure and violence is pertinently expressed in the following participants' reflection:

*“Peer pressure and my friends saying, ‘Ja, hit him, hit him...’ That really gets you going.”*

As peers typically replace the family as the centre of a young person's socialising and leisure activities during adolescence, peer relationships often encourage problematic behaviours (Lingren, 1995: 1). Social acceptance is critically important in the establishment of positive self-esteem and the self-evaluation process (Ungar, 2000: 2) for adolescents at school, as these learners intensely fear the pain and distress of social isolation and rejection (Cowie & Sharp, 1998: 72-73) This concentrated fear is expressed by one of the participants:

*“I was so nervous but I had to fight...all my friends were standing and chanting around us.”*

The adolescent hence, often finds himself trapped in an extreme emotional predicament when confronted or involved in a dispute, fighting his personal belief

system on the one hand, and trying to maintain and entrench himself as a popular member of the peer group on the other. The pressure and verbal encouragement of his peers to resort to violence is both exciting and psychologically pressurising, and the youth, although often not wanting to fight, will most likely succumb to the will of his fellow learners. Peers hereby reinforce disruptive behaviour through providing attention to learners involved in inappropriate or aggressive behaviour (Fitzsimmons, 1998: 1).

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

The three themes obtained from an analysis of the participants' responses, involving issues of masculinity, male identity formation and peer pressure, represent prominent subsystems within an ecosystemic evaluation and description of male adolescent behaviour within the secondary educational sphere in South Africa. Similarly, each concept remains interdependently linked and signifies an interconnected and circular relationship classification that has multiple effects on violent-based behavioural manifestations.

Due to the elevated presence of violence within the South African culture, the participants remain continually exposed to overt institutions of masculinity, patriarchy and pressure to appropriately conform to acceptable echelons of male conduct, from an early age. The participants consequently exhibited emotional and psychological vulnerability that contributed to their display of aggression and hostility at school and which, in their eyes, cosseted their male gender-role and social standing amongst the peer group, amidst their fears of ostracism and rejection. The participants' exposure and socialisation into a persistent and contemporary culture of violence left their violent responses, largely unexplainable. Their continued association with violence and violent manifestations appear to have been institutionalised, inherited and incorporated as a part of their emotional and psychological constitution, and remains an exceedingly problematic issue to address, insofar as South African society persists in the promotion of hegemonic masculinity configurations and remains ignorant regarding the control and neutralisation of this pernicious cycle of violence and aggression that persists as part of its normalised cultural existence.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*“We challenge the culture of violence when we ourselves act in the certainty that violence is no longer acceptable, that it is tired and outdated no matter how many cling to it in the stubborn belief that it still works and that it’s still valid.”*

Vanderhaar

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The research has indicated that an explanation of endemic violence associated with male adolescent learners in secondary schools in South Africa, is inextricably linked to a variety of factors that require an ecosystemic evaluation and analysis strategy, as a means of affording an effective rationalization of this type of pathological behaviour. Violence in South Africa has essentially become a normative rather than a deviant process and is regarded as an appropriate and natural means of resolving various conflicts (Simpson, 1993: 1). The prevalence of violence is hereby historically and contemporarily sanctioned as a method of maintaining and attaining social power and dominance and male adolescent youths are socialised into viewing aggressive and hostile conflict resolution, as a normalised component of male behaviour.

The investigation of participants’ experiences of violence in the secondary educational milieu provided a practical and useful clarification and justification for the use of violence among adolescents. Similarly, the research yielded several pronounced themes including overt masculinity establishment, male gender-role socialisation premised on hegemony and control and a peer pressure structure that negatively informed violent action as an acceptable and critical male constituent. These particular and common issues established via the participants’ responses, are traditionally and socially interconnected and maintained by a system of patriarchy and hegemony that has bequeathed to South Africa a culture of violence.

Various practical strategies exist for educators, to assist in the control and alleviation of violence in schools. Particular strategies will be recommended that relate to holistic approaches in curbing violent behaviour in the educational sphere.

## 5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The following inferences were made regarding the themes discussed in the previous section:

- *Masculinity and power as a societal influence on violence:* Male adolescent youths within the private, urban, secondary educational sphere in South Africa display a socialisation into the ‘culture’ of violence that exists in the country and appear to perceive violence as a natural, normal and essential component of male and masculine behaviour. The aggressive patriarchal and societal forces that have historically existed and that continue to sanction violence as a means of male dominance and power have hereby, infiltrated the very substance of our youths’ existence. This insidious cycle of aggression continues, and is borne out particularly within the secondary educational milieu within which the psychologically ‘fragile’ juncture of adolescence is reached.
- *Violence underpinned by male identity formation and gender-role socialisation in schools:* This theme is intrinsically related to masculinity and power, and male adolescents in South Africa give the impression of placing an implausible measure of importance on complying with a perception of what is deemed to be acceptable ‘male’ behaviour. Unfortunately, as South African society consigns excessive focus on constructs of ‘machismo’ and overt masculinity, male adolescent youths within the secondary educational system have been institutionalised into viewing the achievement of appropriate male behaviour as reliant upon violent and aggressive tendencies. Male identity formation is hereby premised on these negative perceptions, which are regrettably also being promoted by the structures and ideologies of secondary schooling systems themselves.

- *The coercion of peer pressure:* Negative peer pressure appears to be highly prevalent within South African private, secondary schools and adolescent males are frequently and reluctantly encouraged into violent conflict as a means of upholding dominant values and perceptions of male power assertion. The coercive nature of peer pressure is particularly prevalent during adolescence, during which the adolescent intensely fears rejection and isolation from his peers. School rules and regulations do not appear to curb violent occurrences as an adolescents' struggle for acceptance and inclusion, far outweighs his fear for the disciplinary consequences of his violent actions.

## 5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.3.1 A system of Pastoral Care

As learners exposed to violence are in need of emotional and psychological support and counselling (cf. 1.1), Pastoral Care interventions have become an integral and highly necessary component of modern educational systems across the globe. Apart from living in a complex society, characterised by ethnic diversity and wrought with economic inequality, political and social dysfunction and excessively large educator-learner ratios, the demands placed on educators in South African schools are becoming increasingly more problematic. Correspondingly, the increasing levels of adolescent aggression and physical abuse in secondary schools throughout the country have necessitated the urgent requirement for Pastoral Care and counselling strategies, in an effort to address violence and support for learners who are affected on an emotional and physical level.

Cowie and Pecherek (1994: 13) consequently identify the importance of a Pastoral Care system, as a linchpin in establishing the ethos of the school. As previously mentioned, the schools' ethos is critically important in its creation of a value structure that is gender neutral (cf. 2.4.3.3.2) and through which the organisation of its educator, curriculum and sport compositions, promote equality and fairness. In this respect, issues of male dominance and aggression will not be inadvertently supported and endorsed, by both the culture of the school or through its educators and

curriculum. According to Clemett and Pearce (in Cowie & Pecherek, 1994: 14), this Pastoral Care system should contain three main elements, namely:

- The assistance of young people towards achieving the skills and personal qualities required for informed decision making and the acquisition of personal autonomy.
- Acknowledging and equipping learners with the skills required for adulthood.
- The provision of help, guidance and support in the establishment of the effective functioning of children in school.

Should the above mentioned elements be incorporated into the psyche of male adolescent learners, aspects of self-belief, self confidence and support mechanisms would equip learners with the inherent ability to evade the pressures of peers to participate in violent activity and empower them with a belief and value structure that underscores peaceful resolutions to conflict.

Hereby the school remains as an extremely important system within a complex social context. Successful learning and development can only occur in a nurturing environment and within an educational culture that is supportive and which promotes the provision of a safe and secure learning milieu (cf. 2.4.3.3). Watson (1990: 108) states that learners within a secure system are able to experience a sense of being accepted in relation to both individuals and groups, hereby allowing for the development of self-competency and self-concept. These behavioural constructs provide individuals with the tools to counteract a necessity to behave aggressively as an assertion of masculinity and allow for the formation of a gender-role identity which is stable and self-assured.

Collins (1999: 32) highlights the creation of a school community that values all its members, specifically the most vulnerable, and that is structured in a systemic way to support what the school community values. In this respect, unfair importance and

reverence placed on male-dominated sporting codes, such as rugby and cricket, could be nullified. Masculinity premised on whether an individual participates in these areas or not, will unlikely be justified and issues of ostracism and victimisation based on these concepts could possibly dissipate, if not constantly entrenched in the culture of the school. In order to achieve this ideal, all members of the school need to appreciate what is essential for the institution and participate in the achievement and enforcement of this ideal. This concept of 'ownership' implies a whole school approach that entails the perception that all members of the organisation have agreed to the core values of the school, where their roles and responsibilities within the system are clear and where structures of support and communication lines are open and available (Collins, 1999: 37).

As long as learners have respect for the school as an organisation that facilitates their educational and developmental requirements, and hereby, inherit ownership of the schools' value and rule structures, their motivation to become involved in violent-based activity could be nullified, as they might take responsibility upon themselves to defend what is 'theirs'. This system, which essentially involves the co-operation and participation of all its members, is closely related with the concept of the health promoting school and should be implemented by principals and educators at all schools.

### **5.3.2 The Health Promoting School**

A key component in effective educational process is a school environment that aims at establishing a democratic, safe and healthy environment for learning and which addresses issues of discrimination and violence. The successful implementation and existence of this ideology is reliant upon the fundamental support of parents, learners, educators and the wider community (Donald, *et al.*, 1997: 100-103). Health-promoting schools endeavour to enhance community involvement and effective educator and learner support structures. This is effected in order to embrace and strive for a holistic vision of health, and to emphasise notions of care and well-being. These concepts consequently assist in the reduction of fear of violence, by the promotion and encouragement of respect, teamwork and quality education (Kickbusch & Jones, 1998: 1).



Swart and Reddy (1999: 1), describe the benefits of establishing a health-promoting education network throughout schools in South Africa that will effectively replace the traditional model of school health. These traditional models of health existed in most schools of the Apartheid regime and included screening and assessment of visual, auditory and nutritional conditions. The practitioners experienced several hurdles and the provision of services were based largely along disproportionate and racially segregated lines, with financial constraints and inadequate training of staff (Swart & Reddy, 1999: 2). The more recent and comprehensive model of health proposed for health-promoting schools, seeks rather to address problematic psychological and physiological issues so as to pinpoint potentially damaging behavioural traits such as violence, as early as possible, and hereby utilises a preventative rather than punishment-based ideology.

Lazarus and Reddy (in Donald, *et al.*, 1997: 84) view the development of a health-promoting school as being dependent upon a comprehensive approach that includes the incorporation of the following aspects:

- **The development of healthy public policy:** This aspect involves a policy that incorporates a common vision of health-promotion, including the provision of inclusion and equity services, based on race, gender and ability.
- **The development of a supportive environment:** This includes both the physical and psycho-social milieu of the school and suggests the implementation of a safe environment that is also accessible to learners with special needs. A management structure should be developed that includes teamwork and conflict management at all levels.
- **Strengthening community action and participation:** This involves the formulation of strong links with the local community, promoting greater community participation in the life of the school.

- **The development of personal skills:** This encourages the implementation of a programme for staff development as well as life-skill education for learners.
- **Re-orientation of health services:** This supports the creation of improved education support services, assisting them in becoming coordinated and accessible.

With respect to issues of conflict and violence, the concept of the health-promoting school is extremely viable and should be employed and applied by principals and educators at every South African school. Rather than dealing with counselling and support strategies for learners affected by violence, the health-promoting school aims to engender and foster an environment that is devoid of conflict and fear and which, seeks to eradicate the notion of violence as a regular and accepted feature of a schools' ethos and culture.

### 5.3.3 A systemic solution

Hernandez and Seem (2004: 1-2) stress the importance of the internal educational climate of a school and identify that the manner in which a school is operated is directly related to the level of behavioural disruptions in schools. Hereby, schools in which the multiple and interrelated systems of administration, communication, management and low educator morale are prevalent, experience a higher level of learner disorder that consequently contributes to unsafe and violent schooling systems. Rembolt (1994: 2) argues therefore, that since violence is a systemic problem, it takes a systemic effort to address issues of school safety. The entire school community with the assistance of a skilled educational counsellor need to conceptualise and develop a safe school climate by promoting a positive school environment and developing unified social relationships premised on the same underlying values and ethics.

It is critical that schools and school principals allow learners to become involved in their own safety and that learners are permitted to facilitate educators in planning school safety procedures and measures. By promoting learner participation and

involvement, in curbing violence within the educational environment, violent actions will be frowned upon by the student body, hereby invalidating negative peer pressure and issues of masculinity, through the promotion of maturity and self-restraint.

## **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The following recommendations for further research have been provided:

- As the research study was conducted in an urban, private institution it would be interesting to conduct a study within a secondary educational system that is funded and operated by the Government and that is based in a rural area. Such a study would explore to what extent State operated rural institutions experience similar difficulties related to violence and aggression in the secondary educational sphere.
- The study was specifically aimed at male adolescents' experiences of violence and therefore, it would be of significance to reproduce the study with respect to female adolescent learners, in order to ascertain whether societal institutions and perceptions of violence within South Africa, have an effect on adolescent girls and the use of physical violence in the secondary school.

## **5.5 SYNTHESIS**

Male adolescents within the private, urban, secondary schooling system are unequivocally affected and inadvertently institutionalised into a 'culture' of violence and aggression, in a country historically branded as a patriarchal and male dominated society that perceives violence and conflict as normative and natural societal practises, utilised by men as a means of assisting their assertiveness and power.

It is hereby apparent that the male adolescent youth in this school erroneously regard violence as an indispensable mechanism in the engenderment of appropriate male identity formation and acceptable masculine behaviour. Secondary schools are wrought with violent-based incidents as the combination of this hostile perception, the

psychologically brittle adolescent developmental phase and the coercive nature of peers to conform to a hegemonically masculine ideology has culminated in an intolerable level of school violence which is potentially hazardous to the physical and psychological wellbeing of learners throughout the land.

Educational structures and systems are possibly at a crossroads regarding violence in secondary schools, and urgently require a comprehensive and practically efficient system to address issues of hostility and aggression within South African educational institutions.

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## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTION**

One question was posed in line with the phenomenological interview and further probing and clarifying questions were asked in order provide guidance and direction when necessary. The question was: “Could you tell me of your experiences of violence in school?”

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT (CROSS-SECTION)**

**Interviewer (RD):** Could you tell me of your experiences of violence in school?

**George:** Um well... They happen all the time, Sir. When I was in Primary school, it happened when we played like little cricket games at break and stuff, Sir. Like if you were unhappy when you went out sometimes, a dispute would start, then the guys would just start to rush and then there would be an argument there. And then... we've watched, there would be a lot of fights like Harry Kewell and Bronson Mitchell. They were just like verbally, well insulting each other and then all of a sudden they got violent and then just started hitting each other, Sir. And also, yes... With Paul, Sir. It was nothing. I just went over to speak to him and sort things out, and then he, he said something to me and then I just clicked and then I lost my temper and that's why I just lashed out at him. Um...

**RD:** What incidents 'happen all the time' that leads to that confrontation?

**George:** Well there has always been tension between me and Paul, ever since he came in Grade 7 and in Grade 8 always. And we don't really get along. We get along for a few months and then like, we have an upset and stuff like that.

**RD:** So. Is it a personal issue?

**George:** Ja. It never really... It is never really like a secure friendship for a long period of time.

**RD:** What else? Have you seen or experienced any other violent incidents?

**George:** Yes Sir. I was saying an oral yesterday and during my oral Martin was like in front and saying noises and stuff, Sir. And I just like said it nicely...But at the end, I wasn't angry with him or anything but something just welled up inside of me and I just went over and I just hit him. I don't know why, Sir. It was like...and then afterwards, when I was going to bed last night, I was like...Are you stupid? Why do you just hit the guy? I like didn't have a clue.

## APPENDIX C: APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH CLEARANCE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Faculty Research Committee  
Faculty of Education  
Edgewood Campus  
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Mr Alwar  
Department of Education  
Pietermaritzburg

To whom it may concern

RE: Research Clearance - Mr Ryan Doig

This letter serves to confirm that the above mentioned person is a bona fide student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and is engaged in his Masters Studies.

He currently wishes to engage in research and as such requires permission to conduct research in the schools identified in his research proposal.

Should there be any queries please contact Derek on the following telephone number 031 260 3524.

Many thanks

D Buchler  
Research Officer  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Edgewood Campus



**APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER  
FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**



RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)  
WESTVILLE CAMPUS  
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587  
EMAIL: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

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22 NOVEMBER 2005

MR. R DOIG (931348383)  
EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

Dear Mr. Doig

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER : HSS/05152A

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project:

**“Male adolescents’ experiences of violence in an Urban, Private Secondary School in KwaZulu-Natal”**

Yours faithfully

.....  
MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA  
RESEARCH OFFICE

PS: The following general condition is applicable to all projects that have been granted ethical clearance:

THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY APPROVAL SHOULD THE RESEARCH INVOLVE UTILIZATION OF SPACE AND/OR FACILITIES AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS/ORGANISATIONS. WHERE QUESTIONNAIRES ARE USED IN THE PROJECT, THE RESEARCHER SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE QUESTIONNAIRE INCLUDES A SECTION AT THE END WHICH SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE PARTICIPANT (PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE) INDICATING THAT HE/SHE WAS INFORMED OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND THAT THE INFORMATION GIVEN WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

cc. Faculty Research Office (Derek Buchler)  
cc. Supervisor (Dr. N de Lange)

## **APPENDIX E: LEARNER AND PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am an M.Ed student at UKZN interested in the ways in which learners experience violence in urban, private, secondary schools. As part of my Masters dissertation, I would like to interview you about violence in the secondary school. The interview will take approximately 15 minutes and will be audio taped. One specific question will be asked of you, namely: "Could you tell me of your experiences of violence in school?" The data from the interview will only be used in the course that I am taking and will not be used for any other purpose without your consent. You are not obliged to answer the question that I ask you, and you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time. Your decision not to participate will not result in any form of disadvantage. Please know too that no real names will be used in any material that I write up for the course and every attempt will be made to keep the material confidential. Hereby your anonymity and confidentiality of the research will be constantly respected. The data will be securely retained for a period of three years after which it will be properly disposed of.

Thank you for your assistance. If you require any further information please feel free to contact myself, Mr. Ryan Doig on 082 898 4003 or my course supervisor, Prof. Naydene de Lange on 2601342.

Sincerely,

Mr. Ryan Doig

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I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in this study. I understand that my real name will not be used in any write-up and that my responses will be treated

confidentially. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time and that this will not result in any form of disadvantage. I agree to be tape recorded.

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to allow \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the study. I understand that his real name will not be used in any write-up and that his responses will be treated confidentially. I also understand that he is free to withdraw from the study at any time and that this will not result in any form of disadvantage. I agree to him being tape recorded.

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F: PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am an M.Ed student at UKZN interested in the ways in which learners experience violence in urban, private, secondary schools. As part of my Masters dissertation, I would like to conduct a study involving a series of interviews with specifically selected learners, about violence, in your secondary school. Each interview will take approximately 15 minutes and will be audio taped. One specific question will be asked of the learners, namely: "Could you tell me of your experiences of violence in school?" The data from the interview will only be used in the course that I am taking and will not be used for any other purpose without their consent. The participants are not obliged to answer the question that I ask them, and are free to withdraw from the interview at any time. The learner's decision not to participate will not result in any form of disadvantage. Please know too that no real names will be used in any material that I write up for the course and every attempt will be made to keep the material confidential. Hereby your school and learners anonymity, including the confidentiality of the research, will be constantly respected. The data will be securely retained for a period of three years after which it will be properly disposed of.

Thank you for your assistance. If you require any further information please feel free to contact myself, Mr. Ryan Doig on 082 898 4003 or my course supervisor, Prof. Naydene de Lange on 2601342.

Sincerely,

Mr. Ryan Doig

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I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to allow the investigation to take place at the school. I understand that my school's real name and the anonymity of the learners will not be used in any write-up and that their responses will be treated with confidentiality. I

also understand that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time and that this will not result in any form of disadvantage. I consent to the learners being audio-taped.

Principal \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_